

A HUNDRED MILLION  
MOVIE-GOERS MUST  
BE RIGHT . . . . .

By IRA PRICE

With a Chapter on Comedy

by

CHARLES F. RIESNER

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AN AID TO MOVIE APPRECIATION

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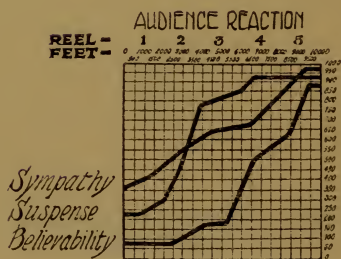
**With a Chapter on Comedy**  
by Charles F. Riesner

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*Abel, Bige, Char, Flin, Hobe, Kauf,  
Land, Sid, Wear and the late Rush\**

The Author.

*\*Abel Green, Joe Bigelow, Roy Chartier, John Flinn, Wolfe Kaufman, Hobe Morrison, Sid Silverman, Mike Wear and the late Al Greason*

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## FOREWORD

This book stirred to life with the discovery that entertainment on the screen was being measured with practically every yardstick known but audience reaction. Indifference to audience reaction was noted first in critic reaction to *Over the Hill*, produced way back when movies were just movies.

When *Over the Hill* was made available to exhibitors, a neighborhood theatre in Cleveland booked the picture for the Sun-Mon-Tue grind. In explanation of that booking, on Monday and Tuesday business is usually a little off in neighborhood movie houses. Therefore the exhibitor books the best picture obtainable for the three days. Then if it clicks with the larger Sunday matinee and evening audiences the publicity they give it swells Monday and Tuesday attendance.

Now Sunday business on *Over the Hill* was normal, but something extraordinary happened Monday evening. There was a line-up at the box-office long before it opened, and when the marquee lights went on that line had extended to the corner, a block away. Tuesday evening was the same, a 1400 seat theatre packed to the doors, twice. *Over the Hill* was a smash hit, not only in that neighborhood but everywhere it played from Coast to Coast. And at a time when the public had learned to take their movies or leave 'em.

The same thing happened with *The Miracle Man*, *Holiday*, *Street Scene*, *It Happened One Night*, *My Man Godfrey* and *The Three Smart Girls*. Advanced with no more ballyhoo than the average Class A product, all became memorable hits.

In later years when cycles got to be the very special headaches of movie critics, they invariably "hoped that Hollywood wasn't going into a cycle of maudlin flickers like the one started by *Over the Hill*, or a wacky cycle like the one started by *My Man Godfrey*." And those great movies still supply the ammunition when captious critics go sour on homespun or wacky entertainment.

When the author first heard critics class *Over the Hill* with the cheapest of ten-twenty-thirty melodramas, he was sorely puzzled. Many movies of the maudlin genre had poured across the screen before and since the war but there had only been one *Over the Hill*. And there hasn't been another *My Man Godfrey*. Thus the question:

If those movies rated so little respect then why haven't other movies of the same type enjoyed their success?

Was it star casting? No. There were no stars in *Over the Hill*. Stars helped *My Man Godfrey* but star casts were common by that time. Was it interest in the book from which *Over the Hill* had been adapted? To a slight extent, yes, but Sunday or opening day business, depending upon star draw and book circulation, was normal. And many best sellers haven't enjoyed a quarter of the business done by *Over the Hill* and *My Man Godfrey*.

Puzzlement grew and before he knew it the author inherited a swell riddle. Condensed, that riddle contains these direct questions:

Is critical opinion of *Over the Hill* and *My Man Godfrey* an indication of the general superficiality of movie criticism? Are the millions who attend the movies year in and year out finding qualities in screen entertainment the critics are overlooking? Why are the movies so unfailingly popular and why are there so few really great movies? And finally, is it possible for the camera to look at "life" honestly and still be entertaining?

Contained herein, and dedicated to those who share the author's curiosity, are some answers.

IRA PRICE.

#### *Errata:*

Page 50, Line 28 should read—

ment and enhancement is necessary to equalize appeal

Page 65, Line 4 should read—

In short, one main pursuit may not be as non-

Page 99, Line 23 should read—

With class immutables accentuated as never before

## PART ONE

### CHAPTER 1

Rarely are the movies discussed at any length but someone asks: "What's wrong with the movies?" Or answers: "Nothing that good pictures won't cure!"

You may have your own opinion of the answer. The question is obsolete. There's nothing wrong with the movies as entertainment. And few movies pretend or attempt to be anything more than just that; and they do entertain as most of our veteran exhibitors and theatre managers will readily attest.

Even the aging projectionists, who have probably seen more of the movies than anybody connected with the theatre, still find them diverting.

Tuning in on any audience for five minutes would convince even the most obtuse critic that audiences are getting their money's worth.

In fact a considerable number of reviews by trade paper critics reveal few if any ever holding their noses. At least that is true of *Variety's*, and few critics see more movies or are better equipped to judge.

Truth is, each year fewer people than ever leave the theatre before the picture ends, movies that fail to hold the audience through to the final clinch rarely getting as far as the screen. And there are enough different kinds of movies to satisfy most anybody's reason for going to the movies. But there are degrees of entertainment as well as kinds; the same kinds often varying considerably in the degree they entertain.

In short, writers and directors have learned well the art of blending the many ingredients of surefire entertainment and at a pace that will at least hold any audience in its seat. But there has been little advance in the art of intensifying interest. If there are any complaints they lie in that direction; hundreds of movies containing practically the same ingredients and only one or two compelling a maximum interest. But before we inquire into that strange phenomenon let us consider the principal ingredients.

## The Principal Ingredients

That movie you saw last night, or last week. Was it a story of the cactus country? A hard-riding, hard-hitting horse opera, or a story of the sea? An epic of droning propellers, machine guns and power dives, of bangtails, pari-mutuels and the double-cross; of cocktails, ermine, top hats and broken promises, of human wretchedness in the tenements? But no matter of whom or what, in essence it was a story of romance and crime.

Time, personalities and places may give the movies a thousand different faces, yet most of the time we are witnessing the furtherance of romance and crime. Those are the chief ingredients of movie-making.

With cinema production so restricted, and never venturing far beyond the picket lines of romance, whodunit and who stole it, one might be moved to wonder why more movies do not look alike. Strangely enough they rarely do.

Despite the fact that scripters in all the studios are continuously dramatizing romance and crime there is, outside the subject matter, very little annoying sameness in the results. But how can eight big studios keep on grinding fifty-two weenies out of the same meat year after year, and no twins, triplets or quins, occasionally? It's very simple if you know poker.

There are but fifty-two cards in a poker deck, yet it is said that many thousands of different hands can be dealt therefrom. And the same possibilities exist in varying romance and crime. Here are some of the cards:

First, the place cards: Penthouse, night club, roadhouse, backstage, yacht, drawing room, dance hall, private estate, but why enumerate places. The whole world is the scripter's scene dock and property room.

Second the time cards, any era since Herod coveted his brother's wife and liquidated him. Practically every age since the authoring of the Ten Commandments has produced a glamorous, sensational or notorious crime for the sake of romance, or vice versa. Thus there is no dearth of time cards.

Third are the personality cards, and none of the major studios hold less than ten aces, ten stars, any two of which along with three or four clever

support troupers will make any movie portraying crime and romance look different.

Time, place and personality cards, (many times fifty-two) provide variations that reduce any strong similarities in the finished product to a minimum. Of course the hands will repeat themselves eventually—combinations are not really infinite—but the repetitions will be so far apart and resemblance so feeble, when it does occur, very few notice it. But wait, those are not all the cards in the scripter's sleeve.

There is the partially-concealed menace, of which the hero and the heroine are unaware, the menace known only to the audience and the villain, or the situational menace, the big bad wolf of make-believe.

Situation, whether the result of a mistake or misunderstanding, whether intentional or unintentional, unwitting or contrived, implied or deliberate, is in essence **deception**, the number one menace of all cinematurgy.

If properly furthered, deception can produce fear and uncertainty of the deadliest kind. And now let us consider some of the different kinds of deception practiced upon the virtuous and upright, the canny and quick as well as the innocent and stupid heroes, and heroines.

### **Deliberate Deceptions**

First there is the deliberate or intentional deception: The innocent country girl meets the handsome stranger from the city. A brief romance mid scenes pastoral and then one morning a villager reports the stranger hiking in the direction of the depot. Then the baby. The family she works for adopts it and she goes looking for its papa.

Grandma sorrowed for that poor trusting female for weeks. Even today we manage to work up a tear or two for that unfortunate victim of man's duplicity, the oldest new deception on the screen.

And the innocent country lad with an inheritance and a yen for show business who gets himself took by city slickers; and oh the movies with the heroine exposing the lecherous playboy on the make for her innocent sister.

And the ambitious fathers who want to be millionaires, taken by fake oil or gold stock swindles, their

homes and business periled, and the youngsters saving the day; those ungrateful youngsters who always go to hell in prosperity and nothing but poverty can save them.

And the gullible inventors cheated out of the profits of their genius by competitors; those canny inventors who reverse their "system" to get even.

And the radio, screen or stage press agents who insist upon planting stories that misrepresent their clients, the star or the star's beeg passion; with the press agent always the Pagliacci.

On still another branch is the home type mother who comes into money and hungers for culture and the higher things of life and falls for a collection of screwballs that leech on quick-rich-sillies seeking the higher things of life.

And the innumerable Captain Flaggs and Sergeant Quirts, rivals framing and double-crossing each other to keep, prevent or betray any momentary advantage with a passing flame.

Deception attains its highest frequency in the eternal triangle, one of the traditionally surefire situational set-ups, probably having its origin in Jupiter flying down to earth and lallygagging with Alcmene, Amphytrion's wife, while he was away at war. Or it may have occurred first in the version where Jupiter started a war between the Thebans and Boetians to get Amphytrion out of the way.

Incidentally, that story is a distant relative and variation of the one about Uriah, the Hittite, and David, in love with Bethsheba, Uriah's wife. Fearing discovery, little David made Uriah drunk and sent him to Joab with a letter saying: "Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle and retire ye from him that he may be smitten and die."

The more familiar deception, however, is provided in this loyalty formula: ambitious husband falling for the boss' daughter, the guileless wife waiting and watching and suffering until he discovers his folly and meekly returns, embarrassed and contrite. Or the chump who becomes champ and ditches his wife for a gold-digger, then loses his fight when he learns that the new flame is two-timing him, the faithful wife standing by through it all, loyal to the end.



One of the better deliberate deceptions was the Bernie-Winchell opus. The band leader tries to introduce an unknown warbler and the columnist stamps her counterfeit. The orchestra leader then plants her as a stage-struck daughter of a French consul. The columnist falls for the hoax and boosts her for a try-out, overcoming many obstacles before he finally lands her on the air the night before she is scheduled to appear on his enemy's program.

Burned up, the columnist then has the orchestra leader kidnapped and believing he is to be rubbed out the baton wielder does a little knee-knocking before he is told that it is merely tit-for-tat.

### **Noble Deceptions**

Now comes that never-failing formula for tears, the deliberately noble deception, probably at its best in movies like *Marked Woman*, hostess of a clip joint, deceiving her sister as to her real occupation that the girl might finish college, unashamed.

Another is the hero who goes blind, a condition he tries to hide with painstaking rehearsals in his study. His fiancee calls. He makes a misstep that gives him away and upon learning the truth she insists on standing by him, a sacrifice he tries manfully but unsuccessfully to avert. And the countless mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters cooking up fibs that conceal noble sacrifices.

One of the later and more successful noble deceptions was the dizzy wife who wanted to help her lawyer-husband. He needed business and a reputation. So she confessed to a murder with which she had nothing to do, figuring that he would be smart enough to get her off and his success would be assured; but clearing her wasn't as easy as she thought.

### **Unwitting and Implied Deception**

First, there's the ironic twist resulting in a misunderstood hero or heroine moving for torturous months under a cloud of suspicion and distrust. *The Rise and Fall of Susan Lenox*, played by Garbo, the most misunderstood woman on the screen.

It's both unwitting and implied deception when hero and heroine mistake each other for thieves; the mistake

prolonged and dragged out and extended with the two becoming more and more suspicious of each other until finally a real robbery reveals their true identities.

Reams of scripting are devoted to cactus country heroes falsely accused of murder, holding up the stage or stealing cattle, the athlete wrongly accused of throwing the game to the gamblers.

One of the better variations of unwitting deception is the beautiful heroine slowly dying of radium poisoning. She becomes news. A reporter builds her case into a nine-day wonder. Later, discovering that she is as healthy as himself and fearing that he will lose his job for putting his newspaper on a spot he takes a sock at her to produce a fever.

The deliberate double deception:

She was a movie star, idling incognito in Paris, he an impoverished Marquis, also incog and charmingly persistent. But when he stirred crepes suzettes to chamber music, causing the cook to resign, and gallantly replaced her to become the only man in the star's menage, his persistence became anything but charming. However, when she learned he was a Marquis all was forgiven.

Unwitting double deception becomes deliberate:

A needle trades Cinderella fitting travel garb to a society cat while a mere eight hundred guests in the ballroom drink to the event, a salesman from a travel agency delivering steamship tickets to her absent-minded pater at the bar. Later pater introduces the salesman to Cindy.

Each thinks the other of the smart set and a bit too ultra for better acquaintance yet they further the deception. Then good-bye and a session of resigned mooning over the great social chasm separating them; a mischievous brother tricking them together; near exposure by another brother, a movie usher; more deception by Cindy's family to give her a "background," and the inevitable discovery that their worlds turn on the same axis.

### **The Complete Deception**

The complete deception is just another way of saying that nobody knows whodunit or who-stole-it, or the mystery story, the formula that keeps Sherlock Holmes, Perry Mason, Ellery Queen, Philo Vance, Mr.

Moto, Charlie Chan, Nick, Nora and Asta up among the money-makers; incidentally the only characters in the mystery division entirely above suspicion, everybody else in the cast looking as guilty as a kid stealing jam, the less guilty each looks the more suspicion aroused until the audience is convinced that the most trustworthy, virtuous-looking soul in the play is the real murderer or thief; and he usually is.

The brainiest of deductors baffled by a gang terrorizing the big city. The mysterious horseman who turns out to be most anybody in the picture.

The amateur detective horning in on serious detective work, and solving the crime. The hidden treasure and the map, the hero in possession of one half and the villain the other. Disney's Three Blind Mousketeers, to whom everything is a dark secret. Cherchez le femme. The detective in the secret criminal hideout disguised as one of the crooks, trying to find where the loot is hidden.

G-men and private detectives disguised as taxi drivers on the trail of gangsters or going to work in flower shops, antique shops, garages, dance halls, road-houses, all hideouts, fronts, covers for counterfeiting, smuggling, bootlegging of fire-arms, alcohol and white slavery, the G-man always **on a spot**, braving sudden death every moment because he won't leave until he has located the **big brain** back of all those nefarious activities.

Detectives on the trail of the mysterious big brain back of the loan shark rackets, short weight rackets, the parole rackets, the detective applying for a job that will give an uninterrupted peek into the workings of those rackets

The innumerable clean-up and investigation crusades: The young and inspired doctors, lawyers, engineers, ministers, upright newspaper editors and determined old ladies smelling out the big brain shielding gamblers and numbers rackets.

#### **Deception Intensified**

In the case of Sir Launcelot playing around with Lady Guinevere and John Alden returning to Captain Miles Standish with the message that Priscilla had asked John to speak for himself, the menace in those triangles was toothless. King Arthur would listen to

none of his prophet's whisperings because Sir Launcelot was to him as much of a nobleman as the King himself and Miles Standish weakened. The real grip in Jupiter's, Launcelot's and John Alden's romancing was not the danger of being discovered and punished by an irate husband or lover but that danger intensified by a secondary menace; in their case, war. The simple triangle did not provide enough menace to make a gripping story. Nor does it today.

It might if the affairs of our modern Don Juans and Casanovas succeeded each other rapidly enough, and enough irate husbands were present, apprehensive and trailing. But in that event chances are their prowess would be enjoyed only by our politically-appointed shock absorbers.

One Casanova per movie, one husband betrayed and we repeat, that's not enough. To be successful with audiences of today there must be an added menace, a second or third line threat; gangsters, the law, a lurid past, or plenty of thou-shalt-not in the offing; a hovering menace, poised to sweep, biding its time, waiting to shove the anything-may-happen or a possible punch-in-the-nose menace to one side and become definitely a something-serious-is-going-to-happen menace.

### Elementals Intensify

Rare indeed is the movie romance that doesn't pack a triple threat, several passive menaces suddenly becoming active, an elemental menace or two paralleling or planted in the distance, intensifying the situational.

Drenching rainstorms, blasting winds, forest fires, precipitous mountain trails, impassable raging torrents, ice and icebergs, avalanches of earth and snow; the rumbling volcano spewing smoke and lava; trapping the hero or heroine, impeding rescue or escape, pursuit or capture, threatening life and limb.

The macabre menaces, bloodthirsty Dracula and the monster Frankenstein; the bats, snakes, gorillas, poisoned food, poisoned darts, poisonous gas, bulbous glass retorts bubbling poisonous fumes; high tension electrical discharges; secret panels, torture chambers, the spiked walls closing in on the hapless victim; trapdoors, chairs that enfold the unsuspecting in arms

of toothed steel; acid vats, boiling oil and the operating table where the crazy doctor kills to further his insane experiments.

Dangers lurking in the shadows. The impenetrable dark of alleys and hallways at night; underground dives and Apache dens; what horrors they conceal!

Shadows on the rotting walls of the haunted house; shadowy figures moving among the trees at night; the lone window alight in the mist-enveloped tower of the castle; the shadowy stair wells; furniture trapped in dust and spider webbing; creaking stairs, rattling of chains, doors opened by invisible hands; fireplaces and walls that open wide and close silently on the heels of the quaking heroine.

Underground menaces: The slimy caverns and passageways, coal damp, rock dust, cave-ins, crashing supports, flooded chambers, flaming air shafts, premature explosions, runaway trains of coal, rock and slag; faulty lifts and cables that snap and dash their human cargo into the depths.

Underseas' menaces: The submarine crashing into an unsuspected shoal or an enemy craft or the failure of vital machinery, the crew imprisoned at the bottom of the sea to die of suffocation. The deep sea divers, the leaking airlines, treachery at the pumps, the menace of octopi and devil fish; underwater battles with sharks, giant eels and giant clams; and the numerous terrifying marine monsters lurking in the black interiors of rotting hulls.

In one movie, two brothers, seamen, loved the same girl; the sea becoming the added menace. Ever threatening to remove one of the contestants it finally settled for an arm given up by one of the brothers on a whaling trip. That misfortune, however, instead of endearing him to the girl through pity caused her to gradually transfer her affections to the brother with no parts missing.

Menaces in the air: Ice forming on the wings, the leaky oil line, faulty engines and structural deficiencies; fog, head winds, rain, lightning, the diminishing gas that will barely get the hero to an emergency field; the sputtering motor, one engine going dead, then the other, and the dead stick landing on a mountain side.

Menaces in the swamps, the lost rivers and the jungles of Africa and the Amazon. Slimy, slithering snakes, gators and crocs, great boas hanging from the branches of trees; cannibals, head hunters, beasts of the jungle, tribes with weird and frightening make-up and headpieces.

Desert menaces: The wild hooded tribes, besheeted sheiks preying on each other and the invading white man; cut-throat banditti waylaying pack trains; blistering reaches of sand, sun, alkali and sandstorms; thirst, dry and aching throats; the deceptive mirage; barren, shifting dunes; the adder and the asp; the merciless sun; the unrelenting sun; thirst.

The most frequent variation of the eternal triangle in that oppressive locale is the story of the two friends of proven loyalty finding themselves enmeshed in the affections of a Bedouin girl, their friendship turning to hatred. Sent off together to save comrades in danger, they suddenly realize that a woman is only a woman but a good cigar often retails for less than ten cents.

For many years the gangster and mobster nearly monopolized the menace side of the picture. He still figures quite prominently.

In Winterset a depressing story of vengeance and vindication, the hero searching for the trigger men for whose crime his dad was sent to the chair.

The main action concentrated in dismal, wretchedly furnished cellar rooms in the shadows of Brooklyn Bridge during a rainy spell. Rain slithering over the clammy stone abutments; cold rain dripping from the bridge overhead; rain washing down the grimy stone steps; rain sheeting the pavement; gangsters in rain-coats snugged around their throats, hats shedding rain as they wait in the shadows to pop off the hero. at the lighting of a cigarette.

Occupational hazards quite frequently intensify the dangers of getting caught at it, hazards not as threatening, however, as those dished up by the sea, the air, the great woods and the desert, but withal scary enough. Incidentally, the circus is pregnant with occupational hazards, a rich reservoir of villainy and menace.

The two handsome young men on the flying trapeze,

both in love with the girl they are tossing about high above the awed crowd, the audience never knowing when any one of the trio will drop, or be dropped, into eternity, accidentally or on purpose.

### Action Intensifies

Action in the wide open spaces, guns, fists, flying cant-hooks, fuses burning toward hidden dynamite, stampeding herds, dust storms, Indians, rênegades.

Cattle and sheep men battling over grazing rights with the hero framed and jailed and breaking for freedom just in time to save the ranch and the society bud that inherited it.

Ranchers fighting oil drillers fearing that oil will pollute the cattle's drinking water. The quarrel over water rights and blowing up the dam. Preventing the bad men from getting possession of the piece of land through which the new railroad will run.

Dangers that lay in wait for early settlers' and pioneering trail blazers: Ramsay MacKay the first expressman, transporting freight, mails and gold to San Francisco, President Lincoln's order to haul gold East for federal payrolls firing the way. Confederates are tipped off on the shipment and he thinks his Southern-reared wife did it. Implied deception. When the line is established he learns otherwise; overcoming a new and very active menace at nearly every change of scenery before he does.

Another: To escape a rap for murder the hero goes to England, enlists in the army and into a triangle, the Sergeant Major's daughter in one corner. Then the hero's old flame from the States shows up and threatens to expose him. He escapes only to find himself aboard his own troopship to China. In China he wins glory and a fatal bullet in his transverse colon but he dies knowing that his pal was the one the Sergeant's daughter really loved. The menaces in that type of movie change with each locale although retaining the same general characteristics, the action menace.

Gary Cooper as Wild Bill Hickok overcame practically all the action hazards known to the wilds. Chief Yellow Hand, barbecuing information out of him anent the whereabouts of the ammunition train. More Indians and Custer making his last stand; Wild Bill's

best friend, Buffalo Bill, ordered to arrest him because he shot government uniformed gun runners in self defense and finally, one of the runners shooting Bill in the back. Treacherous Indians, treacherous whites.

### Time as the Intensifier.

Time the Omnipotent does a nip-up in Girl's Dormitory when Herbert Marshall, an in-his-forties professor enjoying nothing more than an academic interest in Simon Simone, one of his students, finally convinces himself that he is not too old.

May and December clashing in Come and Get It, a lumber king in love with the daughter of a sweetheart of his rough-and-ready logging days, the self-styled "old fool" trying grimly to take her away from his own son.

### The Past Intensifies

In the main the past that menaces most the pursuit of romance is crime, accessories to crime or prison-record pasts.

The innumerable going-straight or regeneration stories: Gangsters who have their faces lifted and are working their way back to a respectable citizenship; becoming doctors, surgeons, famous lawyers, their past constantly menacing.

A young bandit goes straight, is disillusioned and driven back to lawlessness by those who want to use him for their foul purposes, threatening to reveal his past. The youth who steals and is hounded by his folly. The crook leaving prison and meeting old pals who won't let him go straight or going straight and taking up a legitimate business he learns it is crooked or his pals frame him to get him back into the fold.

The heroine goes on the make for a villain to get information that will cleanse her sister's past, remove the prison stain from her fair name.

An opera singer marries an officer who goes away to the front, she to a party and much drinking and discovers the next morning that she has spent the night with another man. The husband learns about it and throws her out, keeping their child, and she goes down to hell resplendent in the latest thing in coiffure and Schiaparelli, setting the style for fifteen soul-



starved years when one night she discovers the villain who wronged her on the make for her daughter and she shoots him. But she won't tell why at the trial until they send the girl from the courtroom. Shades of Madam X.

### Class Intensifies

Father wants daughter or son to be a lady or gent but not around the race track where he made his millions.

A Chinese girl is brought to New England as a bride of an American shipper. Later she commits suicide that the English girl her husband really loves might have him.

A boy sees his father killed by the Doone tribe, or was it the Hatfields and Tollivers feuding? Anyway, he grows up thirsting for revenge and falls in love with the daughter of his enemy whom he takes with him to his own home but her people swipe her back again. Then he learns she is not a Doone at all but was adopted, so it's hunky-dory for romance, that is, after he kills off most of the Doones.

The turning worm is another variation of the war between inferiority and superiority or the class conflict: The timid clerk who in order to qualify the heroine's love is told to ask the boss for a raise. Getting up enough steam and gumption to brave the inner sanctum is no easy task but when he gets started he follows through with criticisms of the management that not only get the raise but the girl and a swell wedding. With so many super-men clerking and wrapping packages the foregoing story has a tremendous appeal.

The story of the beautiful working girl who marries out of her class and into a family that has already picked a mate for her husband: The relentless persecution behind the husband's back. The turning point in endurance, the wife accepting consolation from a sympathetic friend; an innocent friendship distorted by in-laws to poison the husband's mind. The divorce, the truth revealed in the nick o' time and the reunion. There are many variations of that family persecution and innocent friendship formula but in the main the movies hew pretty close to those lines.

## Tradition and Ideals the Intensifiers

The romantic nature picketed by Military and Naval Academy ideals, the good old college spirit making rivals for the girl forget their differences the last minute of the last half and just in time to put the good old pigskin over the good old line for good old college.

Popular music trying to supplant classical, symbolical ballet versus tap dancing, opera versus jazz, the big apple versus the waltz.

## Character Intensifies

An ordinary seaman courts the chief mate's daughter, but the mate hates gobs because they are too much like himself, "love 'em and leave 'em."

A socialite weakling is rescued from drowning, a fisherman tries to make a man of him, a charming lady's happiness resting on the outcome.

Romance split by a question of careers and temperaments. The good for nothing brother, sister, uncle, father or brother-in-law sponging off the hero or heroine. The hero crazy over horses causing the family to mortgage everything in sight to retrieve his losses.

The dubious tycoon testing the young man in love with his daughter with a mission all but impossible of accomplishment. Willful playboy inherits factory and to win girl must prove he has what it takes to operate a factory. The rich man leaving a large sum of money to each of two rivals, the one doubling the amount in a given period to receive the balance of his estate, and the girl.

The timid hero who hates violence nearly loses out with the only girl. Incurrible, excitement-craving boys and girls who fall in love with gangsters and gangster-molls and won't be saved from their folly.

Night club kings and crooners who let success go to their heads. Ruthlessly ambitious heroes who engineer cruel business coups that ruin their victims, driving them to suicide, their private secretaries waiting patiently for them to discover their folly. Weaklings propelled by circumstances and a pair of brown eyes into the role of hero. Adoring debutantes worshipping movie stars, their worried boy friends hard put to cure them.

One of the better character conflicts was *She Married Her Boss*, with Melvyn Douglas and Claudette Colbert, in which the smart young business woman snares her boss, marries him, takes her efficiency from the office into his home, causing complications and confusion. Then a clean-cut, straightforward exposition of envy and resentment at the intrusion of a stranger; a backbiting, neurotic old maid sister wanting the shades drawn to keep the rugs from fading, the newcomer wanting them up to keep their souls from fading, with a perverse stepdaughter making happiness impossible all around; a conflict that winds up with the stepdaughter getting a much-needed spanking and the heroine sick of the whole set-up off on a bender with an erstwhile playboy admirer. The husband then sues for divorce but comes to his senses in time to expel the trouble-makers.

#### The Law Intensifies

When the law is innocent of any knowledge of false evidence, when it is as much a victim of perjury or deception as the accused, there may be some sympathy for the law. But unless deception is complete, any attempt to give the law a sympathetic ticket usually flounders on the shoals of dubiousness. Which may not in theory be acceptable to many readers but when one dips a little deeper into consciousness of the extent to which law and justice have been corrupted and discredited in this best of all possible worlds, audience dubiousness regarding the law is understandable.

Due to that dubiousness the policeman and the detective have become stock heavies, to the extent that our stars lose none of their lustre even in killer routines; witness the numerous little Caesars and Scarfaces who have been rubbed out to the gentle patter of falling tears as well as a rain of lead.

Even though the law cooperates zealously with the hero in foiling the cattle thieves, thwarting the land-grabbers, outwitting and apprehending the gangsters, smugglers and counterfeiters, sooner or later it is revealed that somebody wearing a badge or signing a warrant has been working secretly with the crooks. Confirming audience suspicions in that manner is common because the industry has learned that the law as a menace can cinch a bigger hand for the hero.

When the scripter does go after cheers for the brave men of the night sticks he has them loving dogs, babies and old people and lets the worthless needy impose upon their good nature. But even then any sympathy for the man on the beat is doubtful.

With racketeer-financed political parties always in power and endorsed by "representative" people; big time crime window-dressed, winked at and whitewashed; big time nose-thumbing of crime accepted as normal order and everybody knowing there's always an unseen thumb tilting the scales of justice, it is extremely difficult to either induce or provoke any amount of sympathy for the agencies of law enforcement. Suspicion, mistrust is their unfortunate lot.

As the newspaper editorials put it: "This is a sad commentary on law enforcement." But despite grieving editors and the efforts of gangster pictures to end all gangster pictures; despite the fact that brave policemen give up their lives to prove that the law, if not hindered, can clean up the rackets, the rackets carry on and the policeman is still a swell menace.

Trickery, fraud, misrepresentation, swindling; hoax, prank, plant, fake, strategy, frame-up, double-cross, trick and trap; decoy and badger game; dissembling, and bilking; bluffing, outwitting and outmaneuvering; the shifty and evasive; the deceit that steals such gentle shapes; the vices so daubed with virtue; moonshine, applesauce, baloney and bunk; the gay deceiver; the Pecksniff, Pharisee and Judas; the wolf in sheep's clothing. Obviously deception's greatest value as a menace lies in its extreme variety.

With so many kinds of deception intensified by countless secondary active and passive physical threats, by time and conscience, class distinctions, character and law, romance and crime take on an infinite variety of shapes and colorings. And finally, there is comedy.

### And Comedy Relieves

Because the potentials of comedy are reviewed later, and at some length, we will dwell on that factor here only long enough to say that the comedy technique itself, a necessary complement of dramaturgy, can give romance and crime almost as many variations of

form and substance as all the elements of deception and its intensifications combined.

In fact, running gags and comedy characters alone provide enough variations to reduce to a minimum any chances of a sameness in the finished product. Take the comedy characters used frequently to relieve tension when sympathy and suspense reach the sob and scream pitch:

The fuss-budgets, dithery, hurried, harried, meek, servile and docile souls thankful for small favors, brokenhearted over trivia; perpetually alarmed, perpetually surprised.

The Casper Milquetoastes, nervous wrecks, confirmed pill-eaters suffering from illusionary ills; hen-pecked husbands, worms forever turning.

Prim, proper, prudish, talkative, nose-y, spiteful, gossip-y, awed and suspicious types. Critical condemning, petty, wheedling, whiny characters. Sour-pusses, cynics, hard-hearted softies; grouches, soreheads, and lazy good-for-nothing characters.

Uppity dames, flibberty-jibbets, faddists and gals who soar with their astral bodies; expostulating stuffed shirts, arms-akimbo butlers, philosophical alter egos, stupid Man-Fridays, hotel clerks superior to their guests, bluffs, fakes and four-flushers.

Dumb tough-mugs, lunkhead trigger-men, vacant-faced private hawkshaws, absent-minded bodyguards, wits, nitwits, simps, saps, boobs and stumble-bums.

When the universal pursuits, vengeance or vindication, regeneration or redemption, possession or dispossession, chase or capture, reform or expose, rescue or escape, loyalty or love, ambition or success, are given a laugh treatment as variable as the deceptions and intensifications inverted, exaggerated and relieved, music and color accentuating the natural charm of a thousand and one combinations of time, place and personality, there is little chance of romance and crime ever becoming repetitious.

However, despite the variations possible and the fact that year after year the movies have become increasingly enjoyable, there is no escaping the fact that movie production is in a monotone of romance and crime, those ingredients as consistently featured as meat and vegetables on the American menu.

But why does the industry stick so closely to those two subjects?

For one reason, romance and crime are strong stimulants, but the better reason is that hardly anyone is against romance or the prosecution of crime. In short, romance and crime are safe story material.

But there is a very real need for safety factors in movie production, and romance and crime are the industry's first line of defense against all forms of prejudice and chiseling. And a very reliable defense it is.

Romance is a force the parasitic element dare not mess with too much because the male and female together is essential to the perpetuation of the race. Of course certain eccentrics would have even that changed but in the main they appear to bow to the fact that without romance life simply cannot go on. Crime presents a different dish for their meddlesome palates.

However, as long as the camera is not pointed at crime within the law, no one objects. But nothing can bring out the censoring scissors quicker than a picture exposing legal mayhem or larceny. Therefore, to avoid any embarrassing situations, the screen restricts itself to robbery, murder, smuggling and counterfeiting, or obvious crime.

Second, there is the problem of pleasing as many as possible of a public with a wide variety of tastes.

Let us consider that problem in a broad classification of audiences.

The trade papers classify the public thus: The intelligentsia, the highbrows and sophisticates; the masses, women and the family audience, those classifications supplemented with numerous kindred classifications: city people, rurals, neighborhood audiences, the adult and the younger generation, the star or assured audience, the sentimentally-minded, the worried audience, the "frustrated stenographers with live but crude imaginations."

Accordingly, the intelligentsia comprises those who go to the theatre because the exploitation makes it something "one really must see"; a public with which the concert artists have established themselves; the carriage trade, the tea dansant and art exhibit public, the readers of history, biography, philosophy, newspaper

editorials, scientific articles, propagandistic literature, lovers and followers of Shakespeare and Ibsen, Pirandello and Shaw; fastidious, serious-minded, artistically discriminating; out of sympathy with what the screen has to offer.

The sophisticated audience is described as dissipating all serious emotional undercurrents in gay mockery, shunning the down-to-earth for the smart, the subtle, the ironic. They love their nuances and plays dealing cynically with sex relationships, or plays treating with the hard and pessimistic realism of dull and thwarted lives, the play that pokes fun at the old ideals of goodness, sentiment and simplicity, plays that ridicule the small town, the Babbits.

The masses are pictured as morons or twelve-year-old mentalities. The sub-soil, the lower middle strata, the bourgeoisie, the great unwashed, the sentimentally unsophisticated, the implicitly credulous, outnumbering the intelligentsia and sophisticates one thousand to one. They have no sense nor appreciation of the finer shadings of drama. They seek illusion, the goodness of the world in their picture fare; hopeful, idealistic, worshipful; never tiring of moonlit romance and sex adventuring.

And the woman audience: Women are supposed to love sorrow and tears. They hate all men, adoring one or two, one on the screen and the other off. Women comprise the backbone of the theatre audience. Tell women the secret of a woman and you have potentially great box office. Emotional appeal, pictorial appeal and clothes get their strongest support.

There are supposed to be more women in big towns than elsewhere. They want passion and tenderness expertly mingled. They don't want the wife to forgive the unfaithful husband and they want her to forgive him. They do and they don't want the not-too-good heroine to eat her cake and have it. They do and they don't want the heroine to frequent those disreputable houses.

City people like the risqué and the country don't. The flapper and matron of the city adore flashy sophistication but it is out of their reach in the neighborhoods and rurals.

A statistician digs up the fact that sixty-five per

cent of the total population live in small towns, the remainder live in cities of over fifty thousand population and the small towns want their entertainment clean. A more facetious survey, nose-thumbing the reformer, informs us that forty millions have no bath tubs so why worry about dirt?

To the foregoing ruminations let us add the speculations of the wish-thinkers: If the public has any particular motive for going to the theatre it is to escape life's realities. Hardened and rebuffed by adversity, their dreams and hopes trampled upon by circumstances not of their own creating, they seek some confirmation of a better world here as well as hereafter. And the theories on the moron:

The poor moron is in the minority. His day is over. Millions of mechanics and clerks, stenographers and factory hands are now reading serious books, patronizing worthy plays, going to concerts and art galleries, developing an appreciation of decoration, music and literature. They are becoming art conscious. They are the new masses crying for a higher level of artistic and intellectual expression and this evolution of the greater middle class demands an artistic transition toward better things in the movies.

All of which sums up to what?

Any indication of audience likes gleaned from a study of box office, the high court in most cases, produces half truths or special truths, the box office report more a story of showmanship, of weather or competition, or an indication of star draw, a curiosity-arousing quality in the title or an interest pumped up by press-agency for the Broadway play or best-seller before it became a movie.

With educational facilities increasing and improving, belief that audience intelligence is rising has some foundation. However, the extent to which theatre attendance reflects that rise cannot be determined.

One answer to what the public likes and dislikes is contained in this pungent, terse but conclusive observation handed down by the forefathers of the theatre: "The damned public doesn't know what it likes so how can you expect us to know?" An annoyed but none-the-less honest expression of complete bafflement.



With newspaper and trade paper polls and surveys getting nowhere, public likes and dislikes as mysterious today as they were in 1908 the industry sticks to the old reliables, the strongest emotion stimulants known, romance and crime.

Consistent with their taste for meat and vegetables, the intelligentsia and sophisticate, adult and younger generation, city people and rural have found romance and crime staple and satisfying as screen fare. And what pray is wrong with these staples? Nothing, perhaps, except the way they are prepared and served.

Although the screen dishes cooked up by Hollywood are pretty much of the same fiber, and highly palatable, once a year, occasionally oftener, they will turn out a concoction that leaves the whole public smacking its lips for months, movies like My Man Godfrey and The Three Smart Girls, Holiday and Street Scene. And if there are any distinctions in the preparation of romance and crime for the screen they occur in those really great movies.

To understand those distinctions we should familiarize ourselves with a certain quality all great movies have in common; a thing called word-of-mouth. Really great movies secure a maximum word-of-mouth.

Maximum word-of-mouth in a movie means that a movie is so entertaining the audience will go out of its way to recommend it to others, and not faintly praising this and that, but whole-heartedly the whole picture.

Nationwide word-of-mouth means a movie that has held thousands of audiences in an unbroken grip for 70 to 120 minutes, and set the whole nation talking. And that self-advertising power dear reader, is the final test of greatness in a movie.

Not until we pause for a moment and bring other great works of art, great books and great stage plays, into direct perspective, can we appreciate the really great movie.

Stage hits and best sellers may look big to one interested in those forms of entertainment, but their sales and patronage will total less than one percent of the audience that goes ga-ga over a really great movie. It is indeed a great stage play or novel that will excite even half a million to favorable comment, let alone one

hundred millions, the average great movie audience.

Viewing our principal forms of literature in this manner our perspective on entertainment widens amazingly. In fact when we visualize anything enthralling a whole people as complex in their tastes as the greater American audience, we are looking at the finest thing ever accomplished in a theatre.

Nothing ever created for man's entertainment can compare to the really great movie. Having won the indorsement of more discriminating theatre-goers than the greatest of books or stage plays the great movie meets and satisfies all the requirements of true greatness in entertainment.

And now we repeat, in scanning any considerable number of adequate and great movies we discover little if any essential difference in the ingredients. Time place and personalities, situation, its patent intensifiers and comedy, the stuff that gives romance and crime variety in adequate movies, is the same stuff and nonsense that goes into the making of great movies.

After we have digested that fact we begin to sense things that distinguish the two; eventually learning that any basic distinction lies in the fact that the adequate movie depends for word-of-mouth mainly upon the intrinsic or **inherent** appeal of its ingredients while the great movie depends upon their **relative** appeal.

Now this book has no intention of going Einstein on Relativity, but it cannot honestly ignore the fact that a diagnosis of any number of great movies reveals that the importance of everything that went into those movies was mainly relative.

However, in order to appreciate the importance of relative appeal, inherent appeal should be studied first.

In that respect we have already learned something of the tremendous appeal inherent in romance and crime, a substance that down through the years, through depressions, seasonal slumps and trade squabbles has kept the whole nation well entertained.

But a movie, adequate or great, like a house or an automobile, is a thing of parts as well as substance, and even though the substance, romance and crime, situation and its many intensifiers, contain most of the

appeal inherent in a movie it is the parts that give that substance form, give it a singularity easily recognized, easily identified, making any appeal inherent or relative easy to weigh and measure.

Therefore, we may safely say that next to inherent and relative appeal the most important thing in a movie is that part, or those parts of a movie containing the most appeal.

Regarding importance of parts there is an interesting legend that two forces dominate processes and results in all major fields of activity; in the universe, the sun and moon; in life, nature and civilization; in electricity, positive and negative potential; in politics, the ins and the outs; in the motor car, ignition and carburetion.

Whether that condition signifies anything in particular we would not know, but it does extend into the phenomenon of the great movie; the Great Movie's ultimate effectiveness conditioned by its two Main Pursuits.

In fact all of the appeal in a great movie, original, immediate and final, the appeal in its stars, in supporting casts, in action and background, inherent, induced and provoked has its origin in its Main Pursuits.

However, instead of prolonging a dynamic parallel on the importance of Main Pursuits we are going to ask the reader to abide with and tolerate Main Pursuits for a few pages until we have pictured clearly, truly and fully with examples from great movies, just what they describe. When that has been accomplished we will then try to show that in respect to results achieved and desired, Main Pursuits have what it takes. And now, let us add one thing more:

If there is anything more important to movie appreciation than a knowledge of Main Pursuits it is a careful appraisal of the appeal inherent in those pursuits the moment they mature, the moment they get under way. With which let us go smelling for Main Pursuits.

Sensing that another man held more interest for his wife, the husband in Street Scene searched into every remark and glance passed by friends and neighbors for anything that might verify his suspicions. That quest was a main pursuit.

The wife's philandering was a main pursuit. A budding Communist loved their daughter. Boy wanted girl was his pursuit; a secondary pursuit. Estranged from his wife, the daughter's employer wanted her to go away with him; another secondary pursuit.

Nosy neighbors one way or another all disapproved of the wife's affair, theirs a common pursuit but secondary. When the husband tried to interpret the silences that cloaked his wife's affair, two main pursuits, cheating and apprehension of cheating got underway. Which gives a pretty fair idea of the coverage of the term pursuit.

The young hero in Holiday had worked hard and saved his money with two ideas in mind, to marry the right girl and to get away from what he was doing day after day. He called it a "desire to live." But the right girl happened to be the daughter of a very wealthy man and the boy's "desire to live" did not appeal to her. She was eager for a social career, eager that the boy start a business career.

Her sister sympathized with the boy, the father defending and furthering the social and business careers. That, and furthering the desire to live were the two main pursuits.

In The Three Smart Girls, three sisters, Kay, Joan, and Penny, living in Switzerland with their divorced mother, learned that their Daddy, living in New York, was engaged to a fortune-hunting siren, and their mother's grief was so poignant they decided to do something about it.

Hurrying to New York they used every lure, strategy and inducement, subtle and audacious that occurred to them, even enlisting the aid of boy friends and servants to get rid of the siren. But their Daddy was determined to enjoy his second youth as planned. Exercising that natural prerogative and the daughters trying to discourage such an idea at his age were the two main pursuits.

In Mr. Deeds Goes to Town, one day Mr. Deeds was a poor but honest tuba player. The next day he was a rich tuba player, and still honest, too honest and open-handed to suit the scheming administrators of the estate he had inherited.

Contrary to custom, and much to the administrators' alarm, Mr. Deeds proceeded to use his newly-inherited

wealth to buy land, seed and tools for jobless farmers. Whereupon the scheming administrators begged that the court toss Mr. Deeds into the booby hatch. That was one main pursuit. Proving himself sane was Mr. Deeds'.

"Small people hate and fear anything that is different and will kill it if they can."

In *Theodora Goes Wild* righteous citizens demanded the suppression of a sexy novel published serially in the local paper. Unknown to the villagers their very own Theodora Lynn was the authoress of that naughty book.

As soon as the local newspaper consented to stop publication of the offending story, and indignation had died down, Theodora skipped off to her publisher in New York to find out why it was necessary to sell the serial rights to her book in her home town. And when that burst of indignation died down in stepped the artist who designed the jacket to her book.

Smitten, the artist followed her back home and in order to be near her threatened to expose her authorship to the townspeople unless she got him a job gardening for her Aunt, with whom Theodora was living. And love came to Theodora.

Eyed into a bad case of fidgets by local busybodies who disapproved of covert romancing, Theodora suddenly proclaimed her love for all to hear and defied every woman in the village to go ahead and do something about it. Whereupon the artist decamped; leaving no explanation.

Following him to the city, Theodora learned that he was unhappily married and seeking a divorce; that his father, a prominent man socially and politically, insisted on **no scandal** in the divorce proceedings.

Not until small town and big town fear of scandal, first expressed by righteous and conventional suburbanites and later by the same kind of urbanites began to get oppressive, did the two main pursuits mature.

Two society girls on a scavenger hunt, looking for a *Forgotten Man*, a game they were playing, for prizes, discovered Godfrey, a tramp, on a city dump. In helping one of the girls win first prize Godfrey won a job as butler in her home.

Outside of an apparently casual interest in the job-

less, being a good butler was all that Godfrey seemed to want out of life. Making Godfrey was all that the two girls seemed to want. But the maid and the girls' mother, too, were selfishly geared. Furthering selfishness and unselfishness were the two main pursuits.

In *It Happened One Night* a willful female decided, against her father's wishes, that she would marry a titled gigolo. So she dived off the starboard rail of her father's yacht, swam ashore and grabbed a bus to New York and her Big Moment. Whereupon her father dispatched police and posted rewards to get her back.

Unfortunately for her, an out-of-work newspaper reporter in the act of rescuing her from a persistent masher learned her identity. Seeing a news scoop and possibly a good job, he dickered with her. For an exclusive story he promised not to expose her. She agreed, but both were short of money and the little they had soon disappeared. Protecting her from inquisitive detectives and sundry busybodies along the way and resisting her feminine allure in extremely trying, not to say intimate circumstances and scheming ways and means of getting her to New York, was his pursuit. Apprehending her was her father's. Those were the two main pursuits.

In *Grand Hotel* a number of principal people were seeking or pursuing happiness. A public stenographer was one. A fading ballet dancer another. A hotel clerk, a conniving industrialist, and a thief posing as a Baron made five. Two newlyweds made seven. A retired army surgeon who started *Grand Hotel* off complaining that "people come and people go and nothing ever happens," and ending on the same melancholy note, made eight. An old bookkeeper had been warned by his doctor that he had but a few months to live and he was living those months to the hilt. That pursuit was number nine, singularizing one of the main pursuits, which was, in general, the Pursuit of Happiness. The Omnipotence of Time was the other.

In *The Sin of Madelon Claudet*, Madelon's sweetheart deserted her. To give her unborn son a name she accepted an offer of marriage from a man much older than herself. Shortly after they were married he was arrested for theft and she was sent to prison for

complicity. While in prison her son was adopted. Upon her release the orphanage and the man who had adopted her baby prevailed upon her not to make herself known to him. Money was needed for the boy's education. Procuring that money and keeping her identity, her past, a secret, was one main pursuit. The other was the world's benign condemnation of all women with a past.

In *Over the Hill*, a mother had devoted her life to caring for her children and her husband. The husband died, the children married and she was left alone.

Service to others was her happiness, a main pursuit that did not mature until she tried to discover or create a place for herself in the homes of daughters and sons who no longer wanted her, the other main pursuit.

In *Ladies of the Big House*, as in *Madelon Claudet*, the innocent bystander paid. In *Big House* it was two innocent bystanders, a boy and girl just married. Framed by a rotten politico-upper-underworld liaison and accused of murder, the boy was sent to death-row and the girl to the women's ward.

Procuring evidence that would prove their innocence, became number one pursuit. Keeping the girl where she could get nothing on the corrupt State officials and higher-ups of the underworld who had sent them to prison, was main pursuit number two.

In *The Late Christopher Bean* a country doctor discovered that a painting given him by a deceased artist was a collector's item; that his wife had thrown away as worthless numerous other paintings by the same artist, which, unknown to them, had been salvaged by the maid who had worked for them so many years "she was like a member of the family."

The old doctor needed money badly and the money offered for the paintings would have relieved the financial strain. However, the old fellow was ethical, a man of high moral precepts. But the family nagged and pleaded, a broker offering large sums in cash, and the paintings, suddenly opening up visions of luxury and travel, were too much for the good doctor. He finally but reluctantly headed several dark strategies aimed at getting the paintings away from the maid.

The maid had loved the artist and of course his

paintings held for her a value far greater than any that art critic, collectors and brokers might place upon them. Not even suspecting the value of the paintings, the more puzzled the maid became over the family's bunglesome efforts to get them the more determined she was to keep them.

Getting possession of and holding onto those priceless art treasures were the two main pursuits in *The Late Christopher Bean*.

In *Bad Girl*, boy wanted girl, but boy wanted more to get into business for himself so he could give girl the things she wanted, and to secure their future. They married and the girl became pregnant.

A woman bearing her first child worries in silence over many things. Wife not voicing her worries and husband furthering his ambition to get into business and trying to anticipate his wife's moods and needs were the two main pursuits.

In *The Redheaded Woman* again girl wanted boy but she wanted more a boy who could give her the things that millions of ambitious young ladies want: Fashionable clothing, jewelry, servants, a showplace in which to live and a social career; things that the manager of the store where she worked, could provide. So she seduced him. And they were married. But his people snubbed her and when they did, two main pursuits were in motion. Hers to get into society; theirs to keep her out.

In *42nd Street* the stage director, on the verge of a nervous breakdown from overwork, consented to do one more big production. That was a main pursuit, furtherance of which was made difficult by his leading lady's boy friend, who objected to her being used to honey the show's angel, the financial backer. The leading lady's failure to keep the angel entertained, which amounted to failure to cooperate in the tremendous amount of work to be done before curtain time, was the other main pursuit.

In *She Done Him Wrong*, *Diamond Lil* wanted but one of many boys circulating in her particular orbit. She still wanted that boy when the paddy wagon backed up and took all the boys off to the calaboose.

A South American "hot money" peddler, two political bosses, a sweetheart escaped from prison, the owner of the saloon where *Lil* worked, all wanted *Lil*. That



common desire and Lil holding "the boys" off until she could land the one she wanted were the two main pursuits.

In *The Miracle Man* picking pockets was a main pursuit. A chiseling hotel proprietor tried to cut himself in on the gang's takings. The leader made quick work of the chiseler, eluded the police, hid out in a small village where he discovered the *Miracle Man*, persuaded him to advertise his powers and with the donations forthcoming build a shrine that would attract thousands. The gang joined him there. Ailing and invalid gravitated to the village.

One of the gang, a contortionist, twisted himself into a hideously deformed creature that in order to move had to drag itself along the ground. The uninking process, they hoped, would demonstrate the *Miracle Man's* phenomenal healing powers. Then faith staged a greater demonstration.

Witnessing the faked miracle a crippled child and an invalid in a wheelchair got up and unaided walked to the *Miracle Man*. At that point members of the gang showed a definite tendency to go straight.

The moment the tendency to go straight or going straight manifested itself in opposition to picking pockets, two main pursuits took form.

The review of *Main Pursuits* just completed does not of course take in all great movies produced. It does, however, provide a cross section of what appeals most to the nationwide audience, and should satisfy most anyone's desire to know what it is the majorities in all classes like best in their entertainment. But enough of that for the present.

The urgent thing now is to dig up a few good reasons for giving *Main Pursuits* first place as entertainment factors before the author is accused of being too positive, or worse, of assuming a dictatorship over what's what in entertainment.

Just why do we prefer *Main Pursuit* ahead of other very important factors such as plot, theme and problem, characterization or role? There are numerous reasons but like the reasons for practically everything else in the movies the best reason for main pursuits lies in a movie's chief objectives or the major purposes of screen entertainment.

Movies are produced for many reasons, excitement, thrills and laughter being three; but the larger purpose is a constantly increasing sympathy, suspense and believability; three audience reactions which, if consistently intensified, total maximum appreciation. And just what does Theme contribute to a constantly heightened sympathy, suspense and believability?

Now we do not mean to be captious but we are as conscious of Theme as we are that never in any discussion of the movies in which we have taken part has Theme's silly face failed to sooner or later pop up over somebody's shoulder. Or that someone hasn't disposed of Theme with one all-revealing burp-like definition.

"What is Theme?"

"Why, uh, the Theme is the gist of the play, the subject matter. Or the Theme is the substance, the basic idea, or the backbone of the play; or the dramatization of a proverb, an adage or parable. Or the Theme is the proposition upon which the play is based. And Theme, consequently, becomes so many things that it cannot possibly be any one thing, and if its identity is muddled or indeterminate, so is its purpose, and that is bad when one considers that all things have value only in their effect, in the purposes or the ends they serve or fulfill.

In trying to find out what it is in a movie that contributes most to the entertainment of millions of people each week, any discussion of Theme is a pure waste of time. It has no definitely objective function. It rambles, it ruminates, it meditates.

Finally, theme is not a part of a movie. Therefore, Theme serves only to retard any useful inquiry into what parts are important in estimating inherent appeal in a movie, a process that must begin with its parts. Nor does theme indicate which parts are most important to sympathy, suspense and believability.

As for plot and problem, no play, stage or screen, can get very far without a plot or problem of one sort or another, but plot structure has very little to do with the parts of a movie or the value of those parts outside of encasing them, or indicating where they might belong in the general structure.

The plotting of anything or the solving of a problem, two essentials to sustained interest, are of course pursuits. As for "idea" or the "weenie" it is said every play **must have**, that weenie is mostly baloney.

Idea is of course important, much as the seed is important to the tree, but like an opinion, a thought or desire, an idea is never interesting until it emerges into action, and the moment it does it becomes very definitely something else. Idea in action, or idea being furthered, is a pursuit.

Characterization is often mistaken for pursuit and considered by many a better term, probably because time and use have venerated it. But characterization embodies two components, and any one factor that even suggests more than one important basic component in its makeup is precisely and emphatically what we want to avoid in fixing the appeal in a movie's parts, or what those parts contribute to a movie's whole appeal.

Characterization means character in action, the thing the actor portrays as well as himself; the lines he speaks, what he says and does as well as the doer; but it is the thing he does, his pursuit, not the doer, that counts most in any consideration of basic appeal.

I Met Him in Paris, with Claudette Colbert, illustrates quite clearly the difference between characterization and main pursuit.

Three young blades wanted the heroine, the basic situation quadrangled, situational because she was not aware that one of her suitors was married. One characterized mistrust, another was too wise to be human, the third was not dependable. All three wanted girl, one of the main pursuits. The girl characterized indecision. Trying to decide which boy she wanted she characterized the principal variation of the other main pursuit, girl wants boy.

Beulah Bondi characterized a catty busybody in Street Scene. At the same time she furthered disapprobation of wife-stealing or cheating. Street Scene

was judged in part by Miss Bondi's conception of a busybody, but it was disapprobation of cheating, a variation of apprehension of cheating, a main pursuit, that made her performance notable.

Personalities, stars particularly, are the essence of all that is alluring and desirable to millions of people, but this writer challenges any star to move about silently on the screen for two whole minutes without making the audience, "his very own public," fidgety, without boring it silly. It is the star's pursuit, not the star that sustains interest for any length of time.

The thing is, if we would arrive at an honest and accurate estimate of an actor's personal appeal, what he personally characterizes, and the pursuit he furthers, they should be judged separately. But that of course holds in judging the worth of anything, anywhere, any time.

We judge truly not by some vague or abstruse **him** or **her** but by the specific cause or belief or idea he or she is furthering. And now let us jot down a few reasons why pursuit may contain in itself the potentials of a major entertainment factor.

Getting what we want is happiness. That fact has never been successfully disputed. Therefore, going after what we want is the pursuit of happiness, and in general we can interpret pursuit itself as something the actor attains to, hopes to acquire, to achieve, preserve, prevent or defeat but on the screen a pursuit takes a more tangible form.

Pursuit in a movie means that the actor is occupied with plotting somebody's rescue or downfall; seeking to possess or dispossess; striving for his own or another's regeneration or redemption, vindication or vengeance; competing for power, place or advantage; furthering a test of character, of love or loyalty; furthering a renunciation or sacrifice, a mistake or misunderstanding. But it doesn't really matter whether it is for or against something, good or evil, witting or unwitting, charitable or selfish, with or without cause, foolish or wise, passive or active; if it contains purpose, carries the actor along, or sends him on toward a definite goal, reward or objective, it is a pursuit.

As the reader has probably concluded by this time

the word Pursuit, like the word Hokum, covers a lot of territory, and later on we use Hokum to describe an element that is surefire for sympathy. Although often used otherwise, to induce and provoke sympathy is the essential and primary purpose of Hokum. In like manner we use the term Pursuit, to singularize and therefore simplify the identity and purpose of a major basic factor in entertainment.

Pursuit becomes a most important factor because it connotes **action, movement, progress**, things categorically essential to an intensification of audience interest.

Pursuit gives action, movement and progress, be it social, political or economic, physical, emotional or mental, moral, ethical or spiritual, a singularity that is easily and quickly recognized and appreciated by any kind of audience, anywhere.

Pursuit is fundamentally important because it has an efficiency as a single factor impossible to any other factor in entertainment. It is highly amenable to treatment, highly objective. It can be shaped and directed, gauged and measured, amplified and enhanced, made to grow or wasted, enriched or impoverished to a definite end and purpose. It can be infused or endowed with qualities that the actor does not always possess, qualities that give the actor most of the appeal or non-appeal he does possess.

Quite often stars as well as supporting people may be definitely miscast, or cast in a different role in one movie after another—witness the flexibility of types appearing in our movies—and their miscasting will not seriously retard interest, but let the thing they are furthering be in the slightest degree alien to Main Pursuits and not only sympathy, but suspense and believability will be negligible.

Take the great social and political movements that constitute truly major dramatic forces. It isn't the people themselves, the types or characters aligned with or against those larger forces that give them impetus, weight, reality, force and meaning. It is the thing each person in the movement says and does, in aid or hindrance of those forces. And what each person says and does to further his part is his pursuit.

And now that we have expanded so lustily in pro-

testing the importance of Main Pursuits let us take a short breathing spell while we condense the main pursuits we have just reviewed.

**Holiday:** Boy wants girl but wants more to see something of life and where he belongs in it, and why. Girl wants boy but wants more a social career for herself, a business career for boy. **42nd Street:** Director is producing a giant musical. The star of the show and her boy friend fail to cooperate. **Grand Hotel:** Aging bookkeeper, prodded by Time, filling the last few months of life with whoopee. **It Happened One Night:** Rich girl runs away to get married and her father sends the cops after her. A renegade newspaper reporter, in exchange for an exclusive story of her flight, protects and helps her. **Mr. Deeds Goes To Town:** Suddenly rich boy helps jobless farmers. Administrators of his inheritance ask the court to declare him coo-coo. **Street Scene:** Wife is having an affair with a bill collector. Husband tries to catch her at it. **Ladies of the Big House:** Girl and boy in prison trying to prove their innocence. A corrupt politico-upper-underworld liaison blocks them. **The Miracle Man:** A gang of pickpockets show a strong tendency to go straight. Their leader elects to make hay while the sun shines. **The Three Smart Girls:** Three sisters compete with a fortune-hunting siren for their Daddy's affections. Their Daddy gives them little or no assistance. **My Man Godfrey:** A tramp and an uppity society dame respectively further unselfishness and selfishness.

Those main pursuits played to a class as well as a mass audience of millions and without exception the movies from which they were taken sent that audience home well entertained. Which signifies that they were as successful artistically as they were at the box office. But there is something far more important than either art or box office at this stage of movie appreciation. And that is:

Regardless of terminology, whether we call them principal characterizations, chief or principal roles, or Main Pursuits, we cannot judge entertainment values fairly or intelligently until those major factors are singled out and identified clearly and unmistakably.

Once so identified they become the key and the guide

to what degree other elements and factors in a movie concentrate and intensify interest, and the answer to why a movie does not take an audience completely out of itself, does not lift or brace the audience, but sends it home, emotions jumbled, feelings mixed, wondering what it was that diluted enjoyment.

And the next time the reader is at a loss to describe his enthusiasm or disappointment with a movie, if he will take time to single out the Main Pursuits they will lead to the cause. And if he cannot isolate the Main Pursuits he has found the cause.

## CHAPTER 2

### Inherent Appeal and Non-Appeal.

Proofs of the first chapter were submitted to several prominent members of the creative fraternity. Without exception their reaction was one of impatience, not with the facts, but with the lengths to which the author went to impress the importance of main pursuits upon the reader, "things so obviously important!"

That being the case what then was important when selfishness and unselfishness, cheating and its apprehension, capture and escape, possession and dispossession—the same pursuits that made great movies great—were obscured, subordinated and diluted in so many near-great movies? **Obviously** important?

If it were this writer's privilege to recommend a first rule in movie production it would be this: Upon rising each morning repeat twice the two main pursuits of twenty great movies, and do this with the same respect for repetition that Paderewski gives to his daily finger exercises, Grace Moore to her vocal. And when that little chore is finished, repeat ten times the two main pursuits in the movie being currently scripted and directed. This routine recommended as an un-failing vaccination against the infection, allure and appeal inherent in hokum, comedy, romance, action, situation, personalities, smart repartee, in fact anything intrinsically stimulating enough to obtrude upon and dilute interest in main pursuits.

We will add that repetition is anything but fun but it does account for much of our vocal and instrumental genius, and particularly the qualities that enrich, enliven, enhance, endear and enlarge genius.

And now, what was it the main pursuits in great movies had that those same pursuits in the near-greats did not have? What special significance for the scripter, director and producer that they should become so obviously important in so few great movies and so unimportant in all the rest?

That, dear reader, is one of the truly baffling enigmas of movie production, a puzzler that can be solved in only one way, in a qualitative and quantitative once-over, in fixing clearly the comparative, relative and



objective value of main pursuits; which, incidentally, is not nearly as complicated as it sounds; in reality a very simple procedure that starts with a careful peering into the nature and character of main pursuits, which takes us back to "that most important of all things in a movie: Inherent Appeal."

**Inherent Appeal:** The flavor in the peach. The savor in the roast; constituent, innate, intrinsic appeal, or appeal contained within a thing, or the extent to which a main pursuit appeals to an audience with nothing enhancing it.

Sex, gold and Paris contain far-reaching inherent appeal. So does Zasu Pitts as a poor dressmaker and Charlie Chaplin as a tramp. But places and personalities are not pursuits. A poor dressmaker saving for a trip to Paris and a tramp in a gold rush are.

It would be difficult indeed to find anyone entirely indifferent to a gold hunt or a trip to Paris; romance and adventure, absorbing most of the footage in movie production; pursuits universally appealing; and the same holds with charitable pursuits.

In *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, helping jobless farmers was one of the main pursuits. At the time *Mr. Deeds* was released for public enjoyment, joblessness was topical, very much alive in national consciousness; and may be yet.

Accordingly, one might assume that if unemployment ever becomes normal again our feeling for men out of work would not be as great, but it happens as Dean Harcourt said in *The Green Light*, "A man's job is his life," and unemployment, having seared itself unforgettably in this generation's consciousness, that force, plus a natural sympathy for those in need would produce just as much sympathy in the future as it did during the depression and the recession.

*My Man Godfrey* also garnered much sympathy because of unemployment-consciousness, which gives one an idea of how much this thing called "consciousness" enhances the appeal inherent in main pursuits.

### **Whose Side Are You On?**

With sympathy definitely the reaction that every good movie goes after first, and knowing that sympathy starts with inherent appeal, let us examine

other main pursuits for that quality and its relation to audience consciousness. We say definitely, because later on we will learn that no confused, neutral or non-side-taking reaction to a main pursuit is permissible. In fact that kind of reaction can leave the success of a movie as isolated as an honest politician.

In *Street Scene* the husband wanted to find out to a certainty whether or not his wife was cheating. There was nothing indeterminate or vague about his quest. His wife's caution, his neighbors' secretiveness and universal consciousness of everybody's proneness to play a little offside in the marital game, identified his pursuit beyond any doubt or question and therefore fixed the extent to which any audience would be interested.

Sympathy was of course divided between the wife and husband, but it was definitely **for** or **against** the one or the other because she was obviously not too old to satisfy his idea of love and he was too old and too dogmatic to satisfy hers.

Theirs was a problem marriage, quite common, the kind that all humanity deplors: A husband in the full vigor of manhood married to an attractive female who faced certain realities of time, age and sex that men rarely give a thought; realities that women are conscious of from the moment they know the mating urge, therefore realities that are female alone. Trying to find the happiness that in a few short years she would no longer be able to command, gave the wife's affair in *Street Scene* tremendous appeal.

Although some may have condemned, no one can say with any degree of honesty or authority that the woman was to blame. Thus we dare not assume that her affair was non-appealing. Her husband's unflexing righteousness of course threw sympathy to her, but that was provoked, not inherent. Nor can we safely assume that the husband's quest was non-appealing, just because many in the audience may have felt that he was too dictatorial or that he should have stepped gallantly aside and left the field to the other man. After all, he was preserving the integrity of his home.

The only thing that we can state with any degree of certainty and agreement is that everybody in the audience was definitely in sympathy with the husband or

the wife; that sympathy for one or the other or both was present in audience reaction in tremendous proportions.

With the moral considerations clearly defined, the moment the audience became conscious of those two pursuits, wife younger than husband seeking romance, and husband older than wife trying to find out whether she was getting it, the sympathy curve started at an extremely high level. In short, the author had created a circumstance highly partisan, one that forced everybody to take sides or both sides. He reproduced nature itself at war with a dictum of society and civilization that had everybody who could understand English defending either the husband or wife.

In passing, there may be readers who are tempted to meditate upon extent of appeal or non-appeal in moral dictums opposing nature, but that is a subject too involved for anything but a superficial analysis in a book of this kind, having no particular end or purpose anyway as far as movie appreciation is concerned.

More to the reader's advantage is the recognition as early as possible of the distinction between natural, moral and ethical forces as dramatized in the better movies and the extent to which majorities in all classes are in or out of sympathy with those forces.

In *Over the Hill* as in *Street Scene* we find unfortunate or deplorable circumstances again operating for greater appeal; an aging mother desperately in need of something to fill the vast emptiness left by children grown and on their own, with the children indifferent to that need. In part, the mother-in-law problem. However, despite the children's indifference to the mother's need of someone to look after and care for, there was no strong non-appealing main pursuit in *Over the Hill*.

No one could say that a majority in the audience despised the children for shunting their mother from home to home until she no longer had a place to go, which may sound unfeeling yet there is a very substantial reason for it.

There are too many millions of sons-in-law and daughters-in-law envious of mother-in-law's love, jealous of the peace and privacy of their homes, too many millions of aging parents who are self-supporting, too

many millions of mothers left well provided for, too well able to look out for themselves, too jealous of their own independence for a strong or dominating non-sympathetic reaction to the selfishness of off-spring or in-laws. Hence as in Street Scene we discover millions taking sides, definitely one side or the other.

In *The Miracle Man* picking pockets was one of the main pursuits, but there is a question whether picking pockets contains the non-appeal it is supposed to.

In debating that proposition let us ask if the reader has ever played with the idea of tossing a brick through a jeweler's window, grabbing a handful of diamonds and seeing how far he could get with them; has ever toyed with the thought of ever lifting a bale of twenties when the bank cashier had his back turned, or was out of his cage; ever given much thought or tried to estimate the amount of genuine ire aroused by defaulting bank cashiers, or to what extent the country, not the newspapers and not those injured, waxed indignant over bootlegging, tax evasion and tax avoidance? And incidentally did not someone erect a statue to the late Jessie James? And wasn't Robin Hood and Francois Villon heroes revered by their people? Katherine of Russia, Katherine de Medici, Ninon de L'Enclos, Nell Gwynne and all of the other voluptuous ladies remembered, the virtuous ones forgotten?

When we probe into human consciousness for a definition of right and wrong we usually discover that getting things the easier way produces no strong non-sympathetic reaction. In that analysis however, the Quaker in us may take the Puritan slant, a sterner attitude, but if it does at least we should be conscious that it is the Puritan and not the completely detached viewpoint. And no other viewpoint of course ever makes much of an impression in judging the movies. Sentiment is never as conclusive as sensitivity.

In *The Champ* the ex-pugilist was discovered living in a pleasure resort with his young son. Horseracing, games of chance and fast living were the lure. Tourists swarmed all over the place. Along came the boy's mother, the Champ's ex-wife, married to money, intent upon taking her son out of that environment. In fact so intent was she that her wealthy husband offered to make it financially right with the boy's father

if he would deed the child over to them. The Champ refused and in refusing was suddenly awakened to the effect his environment might have on the boy's future. It was only through that awakening, the emphasis on an evil influence that brought on any lively consciousness of evil, that non-appeal however, not so much inherent as provoked. Thus The Champ became another "deplorable circumstance" movie because no one could dislike the mother for wanting to remove her son from the gambling resort. For the father there was only pity.

A few critics maintained that The Late Christopher Bean was a one-sympathetic pursuit play, pointing to the doctor's grasping wife and daughter and the greed in the old doctor's nature as the evil producing a strong non-sympathetic reaction, a reasoning that does not stand analysis.

Too many millions of women had too much in common with the doctor's wife and too many millions of wives as needy as the old doctor's, and too many millions who were neither pro-wife nor pro-mother, pro-husband nor pro-father who had at some time or other found themselves within imagination distance of easy money, of winning a twenty five dollar church-social prize, a scholarship, a bonus, a sweepstake, a long shot in the third race, a cigarette contest for several thousand dollars, a Bank Night drawing for five hundred dollars, or perhaps a senile and palsied relative worth a lot of money and no direct heirs. There then was the force that eliminated the villain in Christopher Bean; the thing that rooted for the doctor and his wife to go after the fortune contained in those suddenly valuable paintings held by their maid.

At the same time the audience knew that the doctor had given the paintings to the maid without realizing their value, wasn't sure that she was entitled to them. Yet they saw no villainy in the maid because she held onto them. It was obvious that she had loved deeply the lad who had painted the pictures—love for one who has passed on producing a finer sympathy than the love of anything present or living—all of which helped to give both main pursuits in Chris Bean tremendous reach.

In 42nd Street we find another play that contained

no strongly non-appealing base. Even though the temperamental leading lady made things difficult for the stage director when she weakened in her promise to keep the show's backer entertained—jeopardizing the director's chances of making a hit musical-comedy record—the audience was not in the least out of sympathy with her. She was fighting for the love of her boy friend, a thing just as vital to her happiness as a production record to the director's. Of course, the inherent bid for sympathy in 42nd Street was remotely placed, because it was back stage, but the leading lady's fear of losing her man and the handicap of ill health that the director worked under made both pursuits intensely human, real and appealing.

Bad Girl also divided sympathy for a strong side-taking reaction. Millions of men and women who had fathered and mothered children so long ago they had forgotten the fears that attend the expectation and travail were sorely exasperated with the young wife's fretting. As a result there was a strong sympathy for the young husband struggling to provide for her, to indulge her moods and at the same time keep intact the money he had saved to go into business for himself.

However, along with those millions there were other millions of young married men and women not too old to remember vividly the terrors that child-birth had once held for them and for millions of about-to-be-weds and newly-weds even greater terror.

The Three Smart Girls was another "deplorable circumstances" story with plenty of sympathy for both the girls and their father and mother, but done in the lighter vein. Because the father was conditioning himself for marriage to a young wife, sympathy was inverted, provoking laughter. Just the same there were millions of old coots consulting rejuvenators and ukelele teachers who had a fellow feeling for the father, giving the Three Smart Girls tremendous dual appeal because millions of elderly wives were pulling just as hard for the girls to win Daddy back to mother.

In Holiday we saw a young man in love, planning to marry and then off with his bride to see the world. And there indeed was and is and always will be the pur-

suit truly universal in appeal. In fact so many people want to see foreign places pictured in books and on the screen and so few have or ever will have the means of seeing those places otherwise that one might call the desire to travel the frustration universal. In fact the honeymoon abroad left indifferent only those few who are bored with travel (adventure) and romance.

But underneath and complementing that desire he also wanted time off from what he was doing day after day, time to find out who he was and what goes on and what about it. And who doesn't?

Opposing the young man was the girl he loved, just as intent on a social career as he was in his desire to live, and just as insistent that he start his business career. And what in a social and business career sponsored by a Wall Street tycoon can one find unattractive or non-appealing?

Given a choice between a long holiday and a social and business career under big time sponsorship, which would you take? You'd be on the fence, just as everybody in the audience was. Appeal inherent in the two main pursuits in *Holiday* hit an all-time high.

So far we have considered only those movies boasting main pursuits to which very few people could be indifferent; pursuits such as cheating and apprehension of cheating and a honeymoon abroad opposing a business and social career, which does not mean that to be successful, the main pursuits in all movies **must** contain as much original appeal as *Holiday's* and *Street Scene's*. Truth is, if that much original appeal were possible to all movies a sameness would result that might be most anything, but it would not be nationwide entertainment fifty-two weeks in the year.

Far-reaching inherent appeal in both main pursuits is desirable in more movies, not in all movies, and more movies with that appeal are needed to keep entertainment vital, but variety is just as essential to movie appreciation as inherent appeal.

The one-role, one-sympathetic-pursuit or one-against-the-world movies like *The Sin of Madelon Claudet*, *She Done Him Wrong*, *It Happened One Night*, *Theodora Goes Wild*, *The Redheaded Woman* and *My Man Godfrey* provide that essential variety in our screen fare, and as it happens those movies had no

trouble building a maximum sympathy with only half the inherent appeal of the two-sympathetic-pursuiters.

Lacking the basic appeal of the two-sympathetic-pursuit movies the single-rolers or one-against-the-world movies are of course compelled to induce or provoke sympathy to rate the greater appreciation. But just because two-sympathetic-pursuit movies contained twice the appeal of the one-pursuiters does not exempt those movies from inducing and provoking more sympathy. On the contrary, because of equality of appeal, suspense tends to dominate in the two sympathetic pursuit movies, sympathy leveling off or even lessening.

Sympathy, as well as suspense in all movies should be heightened every foot of a film's running.

Inducing sympathy is comparatively simple. For example, a mother, ill and hungry, is discovered searching an empty cupboard for food, a pathetic sight and one guaranteed to produce much sympathy, but to insure a maximum sympathy several gaunt and ragged children are introduced. The same applies when a great shaggy Saint Bernard comes out of the barn, tail a-wagging. Try and match that for appeal, but the wise technician cinches sympathy with a squad of pups trailing her.

In *Theodora Goes Wild* the main sympathetic pursuit was the pursuit of romance but due to the inadequacy of that pursuit as a sympathy-getter the author had *Theodora* shielding the marriage and confinement of her enemy's granddaughter.

*Madelon Claudet's* happiness was contained in the possibility of getting her boy back. He had been placed in an orphanage when *Madelon* was sent to prison. Denied that happiness, she begged that they let her help pay for the boy's education, which induced that much more sympathy.

In *My Man Godfrey* the author not only made his hero a menial—and a hero as a servant is always an appealing role—along with that he had *Godfrey* actively interested in unemployment on the city dump.

The hero in *It Happened One Night* was also one of the unemployed. But not sure of the heart tug in unemployment the author saddled him with a strange lady in distress—than which nothing contains more



danger—and then to insure maximum sympathy he had him shell out his last badly-needed dollar to a stranded bus passenger's impoverished kid.

Because Diamond Lil's role was obviously non-appealing, as far as the greater audience was concerned, the author induced more sympathy when he had her sacrifice a valuable piece of jewelry to save the mission chief from eviction, and then had her rescue an innocent country girl being forced into white slavery.

Jailing newlyweds on the eve of their marriage is probably the most effective sympathy-getter an author could cook up unless he were one of those few inhibited or embittered souls who have completely forgotten the days when desire ran a temperature.

Condemning the hero to death for a crime he knew nothing about did not contain enough appeal to satisfy the author of *Ladies of the Big House* so he had the police toss his wife into prison. All of which gives us a pretty fair idea of what induces sympathy.

As for provocation of sympathy any provocation must necessarily originate in things that hinder the furtherance of a sympathetic pursuit, some non-appealing factor, a non-appealing pursuit, a circumstance or condition that stands in the way of sympathetic pursuit-furtherance. But the question now arises as to just how much the alleged non-appealing pursuits, people and backgrounds actually arouse the fear or loathing necessary to provoke adequate sympathy. To what extent do our movie menaces, villains and heavies in general present a danger, a threat or hazard to the happiness of hero or heroine?

In one-sympathetic-pursuit plays such as *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *It Happened One Night*, *Ladies of the Big House*, *My Man Godfrey*, *The Redheaded Woman* and *Theodora Goes Wild* the non-appealing pursuits were snooping detectives, newspapers and local busybodies harassing the flight of a romantic couple; predatory administrators after Mr. Deeds' inheritance; the upper politico-under-world blocking the escape of newlyweds innocently incarcerated for murder; a pair of dizzy females on the make for their butler; village stuffed shirts excluding a lovely but socially ineligible store clerk; and smug big town and small town fear of scandal getting in the way of *Theodora's* romance.

Of course the foregoing pursuits contain more non-appeal than any of the potentially non-appealing pursuits we have reviewed in plays like *Street Scene*, *Holiday*, *The Miracle Man* and *The Three Smart Girls*, non-appealing pursuits such as extra-marital activities, social and business careers, picking pockets and falling for a lovely fortune hunter. But how much dislike, aversion or loathing can one feel for any of those pursuits? To what extent are they actually or potentially non-appealing; inherently malevolent, noxious, menacing, oppressive or execrable? To what extent are they automatically hated?

Hatred is an expression of extreme dislike, rarely spontaneous, really a climactic reaction, invariably the result of a cumulative loathing. For example:

Not until the crisis was reached in *Over the Hill*, not until relentless greed had taken complete possession of one of the sons, not until that son had chiseled his mother out of her home and had sent her packing off to the poorhouse was any real hatred or desire for vengeance engendered in the audience. Therefore, we can safely say that none of the potentially non-appealing pursuits we have reviewed are inherently hateful to the majorities.

All emotional reaction to a movie being vicarious at its best, then the best a movie can hope to get in the way of a non-sympathetic reaction is dislike, disapprobation, fear or envy, reactions in the main produced by luxurious, repulsive or awesome backgrounds, and an arrogant, cold, haughty, ugly or brutal type of menace, or types and backgrounds that are menacing because they are remote from average experience. Even then inherent hatefulness is a question.

Mary Astor in the role of the career-hungry fiancée—she was the villainess in *Holiday*—was altogether too lovely and desirable for outright dislike. Perhaps some of the ladies were envious of her advantages but there was no loathing, and her father—the villain—Wall Street type if ever there was one, manifestly a power in the most feared financial canyon in the world, drew respect, admiration, a mixture of awe and envy, and his background was anything but provocative of hatred.

No one could feel any genuine loathing for that fam-

ily of harmless nuts in My Man Godfrey, or any real harm in them. They were delightfully, not dangerously coo-coo, and the one active menace, the girl who was trying to get Godfrey fired, played by Gail Patrick, was just a bit too charming for anyone to get wholeheartedly mad at.

No one could dislike the race touts, moochers, pugs and scarlet ladies in The Champ. Although they were aids alienating the Champ and his son and were obviously furthering the mother's cause, there was no loathing for them. They were pitiful or exciting, not repulsive or hateful.

There were really no unlovely types arousing antipathy or fear in Grand Hotel. It wasn't until Kringelein's ex-employer began to resent his presence in Grand Hotel that the audience felt any antipathy at all. The reaction then was the kind one feels toward Simon Legree in Uncle Tom's Cabin, or the sinister scenery-chewer in The Drunkard who snarled and sneered through a marcelled lip at the fair-haired hero and scared no one, including the hero.

Fact is, Kringelein's ex-employer provoked no great amount of sympathy for Kringelein until he started shoving the old fellow around and for a moment the audience loved and hated with everything they had, but we repeat, that hatred was momentary. It didn't last.

There wasn't one personality in all of Grand Hotel of any non-appeal to speak of, or one that got seriously in the way of Kringelein's happiness. As for non-appealing personalities in general, Charles Schneider's tribute to the late Monroe Owsley just about covers the subject.

"Owsley's face (for melodramatic purposes) was a perpetual sneer. On occasion it would relax into a leer. He smoked a cigaret more casually than most men could, and he flicked off the ashes with fingers that were always jittery. He seldom looked in the eye of the person to whom he was speaking, and his voice was unforgettably cold and hard.

"There have been few of subtle style who could turn an insult with more finesse, threaten a more casual blackmail, induce the innocent ingenue to come see his etchings with snakier slickness, or flash more dag-

gers from his eyes after taking a slap across the mouth from the upright young hero. There have been few who could outdo Mr. Owsley in portraying a petty blackguard.

"Of late Basil Rathbone has set a high standard of classical villainy but with the exception of the late Gordon Westcott no actor on the screen could so fully merit the audience's profound contempt as Monroe Owsley. Yet one never really hated him."

As for non-appealing backgrounds those discovered in screen-plays like *The Sin of Madelon Claudet*, *She Done Him Wrong*, and *Street Scene*, in general the grimy, shadowy, evil-smelling atmosphere of forgotten streets and underworld dives and the wretched denizens of those "disease and crime-ridden sections of the bigger cities" cannot, unfortunately, be reproduced on the screen in all of their uncleanness and moral viciousness; things that might produce an outright loathing or feeling of revulsion.

In *Lost Horizon* the endless mountainous wastes of Tibet viewed from an airplane at a great height produced awe, fear and reverence, the same emotions stirred by the *Miracle Man*, but those emotions were stirred primarily by an inherent awe of creation, the fear of an unknown destination, producing the reaction one feels when contemplating life in the hereafter.

Obviously, fear and envy, two emotions as nearly universal as any we know of, were the non-sympathetic reactions produced by the locale and people forming the backgrounds of *Holiday* and *The Redheaded Woman*. In fact there was no genuine sympathy evinced for the ambitious redhead until the snobs and stuffed shirts who constituted the husband's background showed up on the scene.

Even then little antipathy was felt, with whatever there was diluted by the kindness and tolerance of Lewis Stone, the father, who belonged in that background. However, backgrounds of affluence and power are usually a cinch for envy and awe, envy being the emotion that dilutes any real sympathy for the lass of means who weeps over a romantic crack-up in a silklined boudoir; which weepings have become increasingly fewer, thank Pete Smith.

Inherent non-appeal in the backgrounds of *It Hap-*

pened *One Night, Ladies of the Big House* and *Theodora Goes Wild* were closely akin. In *Theodora Goes Wild*, the dictatorial, the regulating, thou-shalt-not, its-for-your-own-good we are doing this kind of meddling that everybody practices in a measure and nobody is ever conscious of in his own attitude.

In *It Happened One Night* it was the non-appeal inherent in the nosiness of a world that will never learn to mind its own business, and along with that an inherent fear and distrust of law and justice instilled in humanity by its wide misuse and abuse in politically controlled courts, by a vicious minority of high-powered predatory shysters and jurists who became appallingly brazen with the advent of prohibition.

It was that same distrust of law and its corrupted enforcement that had the audience pulling for Mr. Deeds, and for the innocent newlyweds in *Ladies of the Big House*, generating the hope that they would be successful in outwitting the police, prison guards and the State; yet that distrust was of a menace remote from the average experience, more poetical than real.

Perhaps the great dearth of truly non-appealing or malevolent, menacing and oppressive pursuits, people and backgrounds, circumstances and conditions of life for entertainment purposes is due to a finical censorship and a squeamish social surveillance of everything that goes into a movie, but whatever the cause the dearth of non-appealing factors exists, yet censors and the fact that progress and education is gradually legislating the more noxious things out of our lives did not keep the better movies from provoking a maximum sympathy with pursuits, circumstances and conditions that were lacking in non-appeal.

In other words, unfeeling landlords and flint-hearted installment collectors, gruesome and repulsive backgrounds aren't absolutely essential to a strong provocation of sympathy. They help, of course, but the thing to look for in the absence of bogey men, bats and clutching hands, skulking villains, snarling and leering faces is a thing called **relative non-appeal**. Take this movie *Holiday*.

The appeal inherent in the desire to live and the business and social careers was so far reaching, in fact

so many millions had enlisted in those two causes that apparently there was little or no non-appeal active in Holiday, yet the appeal in the desire to live was so much greater **relatively**, than the appeal in a business career—comparable to the appeal in work and play—so eloquent of what five or six billions of people would much **rather** do, that impatience with the father and daughter and the business and social careers they were furthering increased to such an extent feeling for those two in the end became vile.

In My Man Godfrey the lovely and desirable Gail Patrick became almost as loathsome because the humble and faithful Godfrey, always returning good for evil, was so intensely likeable.

Relatively, in the stage play, Chris Bean, when greed reached its slimy paws into the heart of the old doctor's family, both the maid and the doctor faced a hydra-headed ghoul, terrifying to them because greed had suddenly changed the whole family into something so appallingly unlike anything they had ever experienced.

Relative appeal, or non-appeal, has two qualities, or rather two functions and two purposes in entertainment. One function and purpose fixes the amount and kind of amplification and enhancement necessary to induce and provoke sympathy for pursuits lacking in appeal. The other is to determine how much enlargement and enhancement is necessary to equal appeal and non-appeal in main pursuits, which in turn keeps conflict between opposing pursuits continuously in question.

## CHAPTER 3

### Singularity

In the good old days the movie audience was brutally exacting in its demand for singularity, insisting as it did on authentic Shebas, Robin Hoods and Cinderellas; types unmistakably beautiful or seductive, angelic or sinister, heroic or comical; and there were few compromises. Then came the photo-cell.

With the advent of sound-recording and audible dialog the public couldn't seem to get enough of the human voice. So those at the wheels of production were told to forget about Shebas, Robin Hoods, Cinderellas, Greek Gods, Casanovas and The Men You Love to Hate and concentrate on healthy, vibrant, trained voices. And the public got voices.

Writers and directors went in clear to their chins for voices and dialog; any kind of voices and most any kind of dialog. Then the greater audience became finicky, rejecting all but a few voices, those that fit the persons talking, and the industry had to concede, finally, that an actor's voice is merely a complement to his personality.

Next came a season of developing vocal qualities unmistakably beautiful or coarse, angelic or sinister, heroic or comical, qualities that would further singularize the actor.

In other words, when excitement over voices subsided the industry found itself right back where it was, courting an old friend, a tried and true friend, **singularity**.

Singularity in actors, in locales and backgrounds, and finally singularity in voices. Singularity was demanded in practically everything but story components, perhaps one of the reasons great movies are great, their main pursuits being so highly singular. Like a person, a voice, a house, so easy to identify, to take, reject; so easy to like or dislike.

Next to appeal inherent in main pursuits no one factor does more to build appreciation of a great movie than the singularity of its main pursuits. And when we say factor we mean exactly that, a power that builds appreciation as progressively and relentlessly

as a geometrical exponent. With which let us re-examine some main pursuits in great movies and see how those main pursuits, as factors, as exponents, fixed the singularity of their secondary pursuits, which in turn enhanced the singularity of the main pursuits.

In the language of the mugg, (Variety for news reporter), Madelon Claudet had the thick lenses and lorgnettes as dewy as the spectacles and cheaters and sent everybody home thinking the same thing about creatures who kick helpless women when they are down.

Now we have already reviewed the chain of events that got Madelon down, the lover who deserted her, the old man she married to give her baby a name, the husband for whom she went to prison, and the condemnation that greeted her when she emerged from the grim gray walls of the hoosegow.

The unfeeling righteousness of scaly-minded orphanage officials who prevailed upon her not to disclose her past to her son, the brutal, raucous, bawdy-house treatment she received at the hands of men from whom she tried to wrest a few dollars, the condescension that people, regardless of how low they are in the social scale, feel and show toward those still lower, witnessed one factor, benign condemnation provoking sympathy for Madelon Claudet.

In Ladies of the Big House two newlyweds were tossed into the bastille for a crime of which they were obviously innocent.

From then on, steel bars, steel locks, steel gates, steel machine-guns, flint-eyed guards, a granite-hearted state that concentrated all its publicity on obvious crime for obvious political reasons and a corrupt political regime's natural ally, the upper-underworld, were the barriers the little lady had to crack to prove her husband's innocence. She did, finally, and maximum sympathy was secured, only however because the forces that kept her from getting evidence of her husband's innocence were of the same stripe and odor right through to the end. Singularity of the forces that prevented evidence-getting was high.

No matter which way the Lady in the Big House turned for aid the response was some variation of flint-eyed, granite-hearted, implacably cold and pitiless indifference and all Madelon got from the moment



she was released from prison was another and still another variation of benign condemnation of women with a past.

Those were the singly-factored forces that through many variations and expressions of condemnation and indifference became truly major forces, and they became major forces only because their every variation was singularly in character with, singularly an expression of condemnation and indifference, and strictly a product of, or inspired by grim-faced institutions, and the ever-on-guard upper-underworld of the politico-criminal understanding.

In *She Done Him Wrong*, Diamond Lil was on a spot. Suspected of being on the wrong side of the law, in on the hot money traffic between her boss and the South American gigolo, federal agents were watching her. To that menace was added the gigolo's paramour, crazed with jealousy, bent on knifing Lil. A jealous jail-bird lover escaped from jail and gunning for Lil in the shadows and a squad of grizzly political barflies on the make. In the middle of that seething whirlpool of jealousy, passion, crime and suspicion, Lil looked like a poor little firefly snagged in the web of a big black spider.

Sympathy thus provoked and induced by her love for the tall, dark and handsome mission worker, plus the sacrifice of her diamonds to save his mission, plus her protection of the girl tagged for white slavery, rolled up and delivered as much sympathy for *La West* as the butler got in *My Man Godfrey*. But only because every secondary non-sympathetic pursuit was singularly predatory or on the make.

When weighing evil as a sympathy provocateur one can't go very far wrong in estimating the evil in man's own nature as being quite as effective as any evil external to him, one of the reasons man divided against himself is so effective in entertainment.

Man's nature, romantic and paternal, charitable and greedy, civilized and primal, a Jekyll and Hyde duality of which few are conscious, a duality rarely ever admitted. Yet that duality is so quickly recognized in others, so common, that when singularized as it was in *The Three Smart Girls* and *The Late Christopher Bean*, it became surefire for sympathy.

Counting the greed in the old Doctor as a reluctant Hyde, but nevertheless a Hyde, his wife and daughter a pair of ravenous female Hydes, the art broker and the art critic as evil spirits of Hyde conjuring up a life of luxury and ease out of the sale of those priceless paintings held by the maid, there was a five-fold buildup of the desire to possess those paintings.

As a result it was touch and go all the way from the moment those aids to greed were lined up and identified to the audience. Touch and go because pity for the doctor mounted with every move he made to get hold of the paintings. But the desire to possess those paintings was the factor that singularized every relatively non-sympathetic pursuit in the play.

In Christopher Bean the audience never knew from one moment to the next which would claim the good doctor, the greed in him or the man God made upright, and that in essence is man equally divided against himself, the exact situation in which the father in *The Three Smart Girls* suddenly found himself.

That father was neither openly nor decisively for the three smart daughters he hadn't seen for ten years nor staunchly for the fortune-hunter to whom he was engaged. Like the old doctor in *Christopher Bean*, he was caught squarely between two natures, but in his case the romantic and paternal.

Indecision took the father the moment the children arrived and held him right through to the end, when, victorious, the three daughters dragged him off to the pier to welcome their mother. However, romance made him no less reliable than his daughters' newly-acquired boy friends. All were so hopelessly in love that as aids in getting their Daddy back to their mother they were a total loss. Even the tipling Count who had been hired to lure the siren off fell into the love-sick category. Secondary pursuits were singularly romantic and unreliable or paternal and steadfast throughout.

In *Theodora Goes Wild*, first it was smug small-town pretension that "there ain't no evil," smug repression of natural instincts, smug fear of scandal that typified the people who cramped *Theodora's* style; smug, warped minds and self-righteous holier-than-thou types that kept *Theodora's* frustration alive.

Later on, when Theodora went to the Big City, met the father of the artist she loved, and her last chance at marriage, and learned that his snooty family wanted no scandal in his pending divorce, and her "last chance" sided with his family, Theodora was up against the same thing that had thwarted her back home.

In short, sympathy was in the main secured by lining up against Theodora everybody in the casting offices that looked like smug, self-righteous disapprobation of any way of life but their own. In *The Red-headed Woman* the redhead faced practically the same obstacles.

However, her pursuit was in the more brazen thread, about as subtle as a machine gun when her husband's people, their friends, their background, all spelling affluence and good breeding stolidly ignored her ambition to be one of the uppercrust.

Although sympathy was nominally for the redhead's husband, who had been literally seduced into furthering her social ambitions, when the redhead faced that phalanx of top-hatted and evening-gowned Babbits, sympathy suddenly and sharply veered to her and mounted sharply with each clash, but only because Society's attitude was singularly stand-pat, smug and aloof the whole distance, as flexible as a regiment of clothing dummies.

In *It Happened One Night*, the thing that gave the gigolo-marriage-minded heiress and the newspaper reporter a lot of trouble was their own empty pockets. Early in the story the reporter gave his last dollar to a waif and that act of unselfishness helped to retard their flight. That and the brought-it-on-himself-predicament he got into when he volunteered to help the strange lady in distress—a pursuit fraught with the gravest of dangers, even in its tamest moments—also added sympathy for the hero, but the aggregate that hiked the hero's appeal was the unrelenting nosiness of detectives and busybodies along their route.

Unemployment-consciousness, Gary Cooper's and Jean Arthur's personal appeal accounted for much of the sympathy induced by *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. But it was dubiousness regarding Mr. Deeds' sanity that accounted for most of the sympathy.

The sob-sister who deliberately double-crossed Deeds, selling his love for a headline, in his mind definitely located her with the attack on his sanity. Then his pathetic puzzlement over why she did it, plus a ten-twenty-thirty villainy in the executors of his inheritance, plus an inherent distrust of courts in the aggregate rolled up a tidal wave of sympathy for Mr. Deeds. Made possible only because of the unvarying dubiousness regarding Deed's sanity; induced by Deed's guilty silence and the universal belief that anybody who gives anything away is a bit screwy.

When the drapes pulled away on My Man Godfrey he was discovered in shantytown among the jobless, numbering several ex-bankers doing their own laundry in a brave effort to preserve the last remaining shreds of their self-respect.

When sufficient time had elapsed for the audience to get acquainted with Godfrey's background—a village of dirty wooden shacks backed by a mountain of tin cans—two society girls dashed in with an offer of five dollars for a Forgotten Man. Society was putting on a benefit, the main event being a scavenger hunt, first prize going to the one who could find something nobody wanted.

The two girls crashing the dump had figured that nobody would ever want a Forgotten Man, at least nobody in their set. But the girl who singled Godfrey out for that honor became so putridly condescending that Godfrey, taking a violent dislike to her, backed her and her apprehensive escort into an ash pile. With which the other girl became so pale and panicky it took Godfrey all of two minutes to convince her that he was, after all, a gentleman, that the condescending one and her escort were anything but the kind of people who knew how to approach a gentleman on a city dump.

So reassuring was Godfrey that the Panicky One took a chance on telling him what it was all about and she became so apologetic for the scavenger hunt and the whole idiotic idea that Godfrey not only forgave her but consented to go along with her.

Briefly, Godfrey won first prize for the Panicky One and in her gratitude she insisted so plaintively upon doing something for him in return for the won-

derful thing he had done for her he finally broke down and confessed that he could use a job. So, without a thought of how her family would take a stubble-faced hobo, or what she was letting him in for, she offered him a butlership in her home. And what a job.

When Godfrey reported for work the next morning he discovered himself the major domo in a family of very unusual people. Among their favorite idiocies was riding cab horses into the library and breaking shop windows on Fifth Avenue. The mother was pixilated, one daughter, the Panicky One, was as flighty as an airplane model and the other daughter, the girl Godfrey backed into the ash pile the evening before, as snooty as a Connecticut highboy. The mother had a wacky protege, a sensitive-souled crooner from the Volga with a draft horse's appetite. And the people comprising their social background were idlers, vain, selfish diletantes, not one with a definite aim or purpose in life, either good or bad. All secondary pursuits in My Man Godfrey were factored by selfishness or unselfishness.

In Holiday the hero wanted to save a part of his life for himself—the young part. He wanted to retire young and work old. He wanted time off from what he was doing and had been doing day in and day out; time to find out who he was and what goes on and what about it. That was his definition of living.

He became engaged to a very wealthy girl. She looked askance at his idea of living, but her sister thought it great stuff. But wealth had left her nothing to desire, so time off from what she was doing day after day meant time off to find something worth wanting and doing.

The sister had two very dear friends who knew just about everything about living; getting more fun out of nothing than anyone she knew. And there was a brother who drank without letup because wealth had left him nothing to desire. Liquor created problems, gave him something to think about, an interest in life.

The desire to live was one of the main pursuits in Holiday. That desire, as contemplated by most people, is always in the abstract. The variations of the desire to live as expressed in Holiday were almost entirely in the abstract. Because they were, consistent-

ly and relentlessly, that pursuit took on a high degree of singularity.

Background gave the other main pursuit—reverence for riches—most of its singularity. And what a background: A mansion with apartments and private elevators for every member of the family. A tacitly yessing regiment of stuffed shirts showing a deference to the father that implied great weight in the high places of 'change; wealth, power and luxury on every hand supporting every move made and every word uttered in defending business and social careers as something to be desired. Those were the elements that singularized reverence for riches.

In singularizing the secondary pursuits in Street Scene a technique slightly different than Holiday's was employed. Singularizing disapprobation in Street Scene was the husband and father, sternly characterizing fidelity and respectability, that characterization accentuated by his daughter's indifference to the advances of her married boss; a baby up on the third floor being born in wedlock, blessing legitimacy; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife; thou shalt not commit adultery, and the neighbor's outward indorsement of those commandments, all on the side of apprehension of cheating.

Singularizing the unmoral was the unfaithful wife and her bill collector lover; her daughter's employer urging the daughter to get an apartment to herself; a blond siren on an all-night date; a husband stolen from his family by another siren; a Communist who in the very nature of his political faith was against all laws that put any restrictions upon love; many restive imps in the hearts of neighbors winking slyly and enviously at the wife's behavior; smoky tenement buildings, darkened hallways and alleys shielding her affair; the weather, humid and sticky, vividly accentuated in everybody's reaction to the sweltering summer night, eneverating the husband and thus accentuating the wife's problem.

Next is Grand Hotel, another fine example of singularization in the build-up of main pursuits. Incidentally, Grand Hotel is selected at this point for two reasons: First, because the technique of its build-up is almost identically that of Street Scene and adds

authority to that type of singularization. Second, that particular technique accentuates the difference between the Street Scene-Grand Hotel build-up and Holiday's, the parallel and the integral. In illustrating that difference let us glance back at Street Scene.

The daughter's potentially illicit romance with her employer, a married man, although chilled by consciousness of her mother's affair with the bill collector, did not in any way directly further or hinder that affair. Neither did the blonde on the all-night date, the woman whose man had been lured away by a husband-stealing siren, nor the budding romance between the student and the daughter, nor the baby being born legitimately on the third floor, nor the neighbor's disapprobation of such goings on. Those secondary pursuits of course accentuated cheating and its apprehension as furthered by the mother and father, in effect retarding and advancing those pursuits, but in the main they merely paralleled, kept the main pursuits alive. The same thing obtained with Grand Hotel.

Pursuits in Grand Hotel were many. There was Kringelein, the old bookkeeper, crowding all the hideho possible into the few remaining days of his life. An aging ballet dancer needing someone to fill the void left by a public who no longer wanted her; that someone a bogus baron she found thefting her jewels, who upon being discovered was forced to make love to her to escape the gendarmes.

There was a public stenographer who was supposed to be nice to the men from whom she took dictation, in particular an industrialist whose expectations were quite obvious but at no time did any of those pursuits tie in with Kringelein's, either aiding or hindering, provoking or inducing any great amount of sympathy for him.

Kringelein's ex-employer, the industrialist, took a minimum of joy out of the old fellow's happiness in their momentary brush over who was to dance with the stenographer. The thieving baron who stole Kringelein's wallet at the poker game gave the old fellow a few harried moments before the wallet was "found", but that was all.

Paralleling Kringelein's fear of life's lowering curtain the secondary pursuits broadly accentuated his

feverish quest for happiness and in a remote sense the fading ballet dancer in the discard, nursing a fragment of the fame that had once made her an international favorite, accentuated Kringelein's race with time.

The bogus baron trying to maintain the regal stride, the old bookkeeper's ex-employer trying to save his financial face, both had a certain mutual fate-closing-the-accounts quality in common with Kringelein's, but no one outside of the stenographer actually tied in with Kringelein to induce any amount of sympathy for him, and the stenographer linked arms with the old fellow at the last moment more as an ultimate compensation for all that life had denied him.

Those secondary pursuits occasionally crossed paths and brushed shoulders with Kringelein's but in the main they merely paralleled it, but always and definitely in character with it because the baron, the ballet-dancer and the industrialist as well as Kringelein were aging. All four were at grips with Time, the common enemy.

Now many readers may question all this bother and fuss over the appeal inherent in the many main pursuits we have reviewed, and the relentless business of enlarging and enhancing those pursuits with secondary pursuits of a kindred nature. And because so much of importance to movie appreciation hinges on the answer, let us put down three very good reasons for it, namely the criticality, restiveness and indifference of audiences.

According to psychologists, criticality, restiveness and indifference are supposed to be universal, seemingly originating in things that do not immediately and vitally concern the individual. However, "supposed to be" and "it seems to originate" do not hold much weight in judging the movies.

Every actor, director and writer of any experience knows that criticality, restiveness and indifference describes a condition that is very real in all audiences, three things that pace the selection, treatment and delivery of stage and screen material two to one to anything else that inspires acting, directing and writing.

Experience with audiences, gotten the hard way, by



hit-and-miss and heart-breaking trial and error has taught that criticality, restiveness and indifference can be traced directly to the importance of the individual to himself, and no doubts assail that knowledge or the knowledge that the audience does not leave self behind when it goes to the theatre.

By audience self we mean all the likes and dislikes that constitute self in the individual, things that influence individual opinion of everything seen and heard on the screen, that is, if the screen is not compelling enough to make the individual forget his particular likes and dislikes.

Take the so-called "masses," the twelve year old mentalities at whom some critics so love to poke fun. Regardless of how moronic or childish we believe them to be, they have in their nature and consciousness an instinctive and acquired sense of good and bad, right and wrong, that is much more critical than we ordinarily allow. That fact is evident in their endorsement in larger numbers of the same movies that have made the classes forget their particular passions and prejudices.

The things stored up in the nature and consciousness of all classes, things that hold first claim on their sympathies and antipathies, constantly dictating their reaction make audience nature and consciousness itself the screen's strongest competitor for audience appreciation.

Now then add to the necessity of taking an audience completely out of itself for an hour or more the necessity of concentrating the interest of the most restive element in any audience, the discriminating, dyspeptic, cynical, pixilated and professionally critical element—to make sure that the whole of any kind of audience is being thoroughly entertained—and we discover another good reason for concentrating at great length upon the appeal inherent in main pursuits and the business of enlarging and enhancing the singularity of that appeal.

Regardless of the neighborhood, town or city, all audiences are largely heterogeneous; a miscellany of attitudes, but individualistic and highly opinionated, therefore quick to defend or condemn pursuits that tie in with or parallel main pursuits.

Therefore, a reasonable number of secondary pursuits concentrating interest in main pursuits guarantees a growing volitional interest, it being no secret that the moment any number of people become interested in a thing, that thing takes on an interest for others it would not ordinarily have.

Whether or not that new interest is the result of a morbid curiosity or the fear of missing something, it is inevitable.

In other words, in a high singularization of main pursuits, appeal or non-appeal increasing automatically, two simple pursuits in a movie become two major forces in audience consciousness, which in size and quality subdue ole debbil restiveness and leave us critics with practically nothing at which to peck and sniff.

## CHAPTER 4

### Furtherance.

Now there may be a question regarding the necessity of keeping the outcome of a conflict continuously in question. In answering that question we are going to liken an Ibsen classic to a Tunney-Dempsey ring joust, which may seem brutally farfetched yet the outcome of the conflict between the gentle and devoted wife of the bigoted master of Ibsen's Doll's House, was, like a Tunney-Dempsey clash, anybody's victory right up to the last round.

The Doll's House was a fragile thing, engaging the finer sensibilities all the way, but, in the end the wife's illusions and her faith were as badly macerated as any mugg that ever survived ten gory rounds of leading with his face, and only because she had held her own with the Master.

In Smilin' Through, another fragile opus, the foster father cherished memories of his lovely lost Moonyean. His foster daughter loved the son of Moonyean's murderer. Smilin' Through was highly ethereal, cameo-like in texture and no end esthetic, but just because foster father and foster daughter clashed with a fine regard for each other's feelings, and just because love was being thwarted by an obstacle as nebulous as memories took nothing from the fact that Smilin' Through was a close contest, with victory for either side at no time predictable.

The Guardsman too, was no less a tie-go the whole distance because those sensitively-attuned high-comedy thespians, Lunt and Fontanne, were not battling it out with broadsides of rare Chinese porcelain; no less a draw because poor Lunt's unwarranted (?) suspicion of everyone in uniform was in the end still unwarranted (?). The Guardsman was a nip and tuck psychological sockfest all the way to the last gong.

Now this ring analogy is of course highly singularized but we impose it in that form for many good reasons, principally though to combat the "inscrutability of art in entertainment," that lofty rejection of any factual identification of values that have put the better

stage and screen plays in the upper brackets when it is obvious that every good play short on inherent appeal won critical applause simply because it contained all the elements of a spirited and an **evenly matched contest**.

### Art is Merely a Matter of Nip-and-Tuck

Unceasing warfare between opposing forces so well matched that the audience never knew from one minute to the next which was going to win or survive accounted for the success of all of our great plays, both stage and screen, and the outcome of any warfare, if that outcome is to be continuously in question, unpredictable, must be foundationed in an equality of appeal in a movie's major opposing forces, or primarily the main pursuits. Whether that appeal be inherently equal or equalized through inducement and provocation that equality is the basis for an ever-mounting suspense.

Now suspense in itself is produced in many ways and we are devoting this chapter to the simple mechanics of producing suspense, but regardless of mechanics, suspense has its greater potentials in an equality of appeal in main pursuits, and the appeal or non-appeal inherent in opposing pursuits determines the kind and degree of inducement and provocation necessary to secure and sustain that equality.

In another way of putting it, two fighters of equal weight and pugnacity face each other, both strangers to the audience. Therefore sympathy is nil, suspense the only reaction.

Now then, a little man squares off to a big man and sympathy becomes the dominant reaction, suspense of a dubious quality. To pitch suspense at a height produced by evenly-matched battlers the little fellow must further a cause or fight with a skill as great or greater than the big fellow. But skill, resourcefulness and versatility, even though they serve to equalize appeal, are primarily elements of **furtherance**, not elements of inherent appeal, or non-appeal.

Furtherance, incidentally, is in itself a force or the employment of forces that advance, sustain and intensify both sympathy and suspense, but the quality and quantity, or the kind and amount of furtherance necessary to keep advancement of both pursuits equal

is determined first in the amount and the kind of appeal and non-appeal inherent in the pursuits being furthered.

In short, one main pursuit may be equally as non-appealing as the other is appealing or vice versa, and if there is a difference in the kind and the amount of appeal or non-appeal inherent, that difference will indicate the elements necessary to bring about an equality of appeal and non-appeal, at the same time indicating the kind and degree of furtherance necessary to sustain that equalization.

With kind and degree of furtherance plainly indicated, and set in motion, suspense begins to mount. Otherwise the suspense curve holds at a definitely low level and the sympathy curve starts for the ceiling. For maximum appreciation both curves should mount steadily and without a break.

### Singularity of Furtherance

A bit of melodrama: The scene a farmyard. Cribbs, the villain, slithers out of a ramshackle dwelling in the immediate background, pauses to chuckle deep in his slimy throat as he looks the property over, then exits.

Elmer, blond and lanky farmhand from across the "crick", enters as the farm wife and her barefoot son come out of the house, the mother weeping.

Elmer is told that Cribbs is going to foreclose. Has Elmer heard from her daughter, Elmer's childhood sweetheart, away in the big city earning money to pay off the mortgage? (Business of listening and Elmer shakes his head.)

There are grave forebodings of what will happen if she fails them. Why hasn't Elmer heard from her? Elmer doesn't know, but cups his ear again hopefully. He hears Cribbs, offstage, getting ready for a noisy entrance, and Cribbs slithers in, trailed by two hob-nailed, screwfaced, furniture-moving stooges.

Whipping out his gold-filigreed chronometer, Cribbs informs the woman that she has one minute in which to produce the money, and rubbing his hands in unholy glee he starts for the house that will soon be his'n.

Elmer valiantly throws himself into Cribbs' path but the two stooges make quick work of Elmer.

"Oh, where, oh where is my daughter?" wails the

mother. "Why don't she come?" And just as the melodeon is tossed through a window, landing in the petunia bed, in maewests the daughter, plops a Michigan bankroll into Cribbs' greedy paws, plucks the mortgage from his pocket and tears it into confetti. The old home is saved, and all's well. But is it? What about that money and that swell get-up the daughter is wearing?

"Tell me," pleads the mother. "Have you been a good girl?"

"Mother," the heroine drawls, "When you can knock off a thousand bucks in the Big Town as quick as I did you gotta be good."

Contained in that brief, homely but far-fetched episode is all there is to building suspense.

When Cribbs first appeared, chuckling slimily, suggesting everything mean and ornery, and the mother came out of the house to express her hopes regarding her daughter and her fear of Cribbs, furtherance of both main pursuits, foreclosure and preventing foreclosure, was passive. Meaning that Cribbs' intentions were withheld, actual dispossession or paying off of the mortgage was delayed. From that point on furtherance was active. All suspense is the result of either an active or passive furtherance.

In general an active furtherance means that things are happening, advancing, making ground, moving toward goal, reward, or objective, or definitely retreating, yielding, relenting, retiring, giving way or in flight.

A passive furtherance means a cessation of hostilities; a waiting for the next move from the opposition; a withholding of aid or hindrance, concealment of purpose or intention; mystery, secrecy, digging in, holding on, marking time; ignoring or disregarding opposition; uncertainty or indecision.

Foreboding, anticipating, expecting, implying, suggesting, inferring may be either active or passive, depending upon what is being anticipated, implied, etc.

But the moment furtherance ceases to be either active or passive, the moment a result or conclusion, decision or solution, gain or loss, failure or success is definitely scored; the moment a definite reaction, elation or dismay, antipathy or some kind of fear results, then suspense is discharged.

Incidentally, fear, anxiety, mistrust, suspicion or alarm should not be confused with suspense. Those emotions are definite reactions, the result of furtherance. Suspense is not a reaction. It is a force acting upon reaction, holding it in abeyance. If a strong hope or fear is being furthered and furtherance is withheld or delayed, hope and fear are suspended.

Passive furtherance, as it functions in most movies, falls into two categories: One is mystery, the other situational.

The mystery play or "whodunit" is one in which the author lets no one, neither the hero, the mother nor the audience in on what Cribbs is going to do or why the daughter doesn't return; withholding even a hint of who killed cock robin or who stole the priceless gimcracks.

If one of the principals and the audience is in on whodunit, who got it, who or what is menacing, threatening, endangering or standing in the way of furtherance, that is partial withholding, partial mystery or concealment, and takes the play out of the mystery category, putting it in the situational.

An active furtherance is often mistaken for action or physical movement, business, activity; which it is in part. But going places, doing things, work and play, pursuit and flight, search and seizure can be just as active in speech and dialog as they are in physical movement although not as distinct or clear.

However, it is active and passive furtherance that we are interested in at this stage of movie appreciation and we repeat: As long as either one or both are functioning, suspense mounts.

The Sin of Madelon Claudet, Over the Hill and Ladies of the Big House, one-sympathetic-pursuit or One-Against-the-World movies, were so obviously one-sided in appeal, any suspense build-up seemed to be hopeless. In fact those movies started off as potential tear-jerkers of the first water.

Opposition, or things hindering furtherance of the sympathetic pursuits was so formidable an evenly matched contest was apparently out of the question. Yet in the end those movies exercised a grip on audience emotions equal to that secured by the two-sympathetic-pursuiters.

In the case of Madelon Claudet and Ladies of the Big House, what the sympathetic pursuits lacked in size they made up for in dogged persistence, but mainly in a consistently active furtherance. In fact, furtherance of the sympathetic pursuits in The Miracle Man, 42nd Street, The Redheaded Woman and Theodora Goes Wild, all One-Against-the-World movies, was extremely active. But that type of furtherance was necessary to keep suspense up because the non-sympathetic pursuits were so passively merciless, relentless, formidable.

In Ladies of the Big House, the husband's innocence and the seriousness of the crime with which he was charged made necessary an active quest for evidence of the real murderer. Along with that the husband was in death row, the electric chair beckoning, while the very nature and character of State's imprisonment, and the secrecy necessary to a successful liaison between politics and the upper-underworld called for a passive or do-nothing attitude on the part of officials, both criminal and political.

As a menace, the mutually protective wall of silence maintained by the upper-underworld and political regimes can suspend reaction higher than a squad of Frankenstein monsters, Karloff, Lugosi, King Kong, and three Bats tossed in for good measure. Fact is when politico-upper-under-world operations are merely glimpsed as they were in Ladies of the Big House, the audience instinctively holds its breath. And a glimpse or two was all the audience got.

The number one gangster was seen but once, the go-between briefly, the actual workings of the liaison between politician and gangster clothed in enough mystery to almost rate Ladies of the Big House a "Who's doin' it?"

With the politico-criminal as sympathetic as a guillotine, stifling any sign of mercy at the larynx, every body as indifferent as dry ice to the little lady's pleas, the death house grimly waiting, prison guards and machine guns stolidly blocking escape, suspense was not only pitched at an extremely high level early in the picture but it held right through to the final fade. But mainly because the little lady never for a moment slackened in the fight to clear her husband.



Madelon Claudet was innocent-country-girl-in-the-big-city stuff, one against a world always judging and condemning; a world calloused and aloof to the misfortunes of the weak, withholding even a farthing of comfort, aid or understanding; a condition that became so oppressive in *The Sin of Madelon Claudet* the audience almost shrieked for somebody man enough to give Madelon a little help; a menace kept vibrantly alive by Madelon's fighting spirit, her intensely active desire to help her son, one way or another.

The aging mother in *Over the Hill*, finding no welcome in the home of one son, trudged hopefully to the home of another, hope and anxiety accompanying her from door to door. When children and in-laws showed in their indifference or impatience that she was not wanted, at each rebuff anxiety increased, provoking more sympathy; but the delayed return of the absent son and the mother's unflagging trek, an extremely active furtherance for an old lady, kept suspense high.

Suspense in *Redheaded Woman* was well sustained because her husband's people, from the moment she married into his snooty family, did not move an eyelash in acknowledgement of her ambitions. Society's aloofness halted the redhead as effectively as the steely-eyed guards and the steely-hearted State barred the Lady's escape from the Big House.

Far into the action the redhead made a showing of a sort when a visiting stockholder in the local coal company—one of the Nobility—accepted an invitation to her party. But her husband's people stayed away, continued to maintain a temperature sub-zero to all of the redhead's pretensions. They would not thaw, which robbed her of any joy she may have derived from her momentary capture of his grace.

Disapprobation was stonily passive throughout, no one at any time actively opposing the redhead to any effect. But the carrot top, active as a battering-ram at the gates of a castle, never gave the audience a chance to sit back in casual enjoyment. And she was just as active and undaunted in failure as her husband's people were unrelenting in their ultimate triumph.

There was very little mystery in *Theodora Goes Wild*. Identity of the authoress of the naughty novel

that had stirred up so much indignation was quickly revealed; also the reason for the cover artist's sudden unexplained departure for the city when Theodora publicly declared her love for him. Later, the audience was momentarily puzzled as to just how Theodora would combat his family's fear of scandal in the pending divorce action, but that puzzlement was quickly dissipated when in one time-fade Theodora metamorphosed from a properly inhibited maiden lady into a bold and brazen publicity-grabber.

Upon going contrary to the wishes of the artist and his family, the same frigid aloofness that frowned down on the Redheaded Woman checkmated Theodora, holding the audience in a high state of uncertainty regarding the outcome of her campaign for romance, and the more inflexible the family's disapprobation the more uncertainty gripped.

Opposition to Theodora developed terrific proportions, thwarting her so effectively that she was forced, finally, to carry the battle for love right into the enemy's camp. Thus a consistently passive fear of scandal and a vibrantly active furtherance of romance, at a furious pace, heightened suspense.

42nd Street introduced a suspense factor that may seem different than anything we have so far reviewed, that of non-cooperation, which however, occurs in a category with apathy or indifference the passive force that provoked so much sympathy for the mother in *Over the Hill*, *Madelon Claudet* and the *Lady in the Big House*.

When non-cooperation in 42nd Street became a serious problem the stage director stopped it very abruptly by knocking the cause—his leading lady's boy friend—cold. She had been neglecting the show's backer because of boy friend's jealousy and consequently delaying production. But socking the boy friend was more or less climactic. It was the ever-towering importance of production and an increasing need for speed as curtain time neared, or an extremely active furtherance of production, and an apathetic or passive hindrance, that built suspense.

The silent version of *The Miracle Man* did not begin to exercise a grip of any intensity until the pickpockets began to lose interest in their profession. Having

witnessed a genuine miracle, they began to withdraw, one by one, from the planned foray on the pilgrim's pockets, suspense mounting with each withdrawal.

As the gang held back, the question as to just how long their leader would hold out against going straight got bigger and bigger. As that question loomed larger, his dogged determination to carry on alone increasing with it, the suspense curve moved up until it hit the highest peak ever reached in movie production.

In *She Done Him Wrong*, the moment Diamond Lil got an eyeful of that tall, dark and handsome mission worker, she decided to have nothing more to do with every Tom, Dick and Harry flashing a bank-roll. But the boys had other notions, other ideas. Their interest in Lil was obviously a sex menace, but held at bay, static, not active.

The South American hot money huckster was Beau Brummelish, seductive, suave and sleek, the kind of menace that gets the gals before they know they've been had.

The jail bird lover was an if-I-can't-have-you-nobody's-going-to-have-you-menace. Federal law, on the lookout for counterfeiterers, white-slavers, et al, a hovering threat, poised to swoop at first evidence of traffic in queer money; a menace of which the audience got an occasional glimpse, of which it was acutely aware and Lil apparently not. That and a just-inside-the-law menace one senses in the atmosphere of any underworld dive, all added up to a sitting-on-a-powder-keg-menace threatening Lil's virtue in every quarter; in the saloon, in her boudoir, in her boss' office. A total threat that hung like a pall of certain doom over Lil; a menace that did not lessen until the paddy-wagon backed up and evacuated the dive of all menace, manifest, latent and concealed.

Categorically the menace in *She Done Him Wrong* was of the predatory kind, stealthy, stalking, hovering, prowling, brooding, brute-passions-held-in-leash; but consistently passive, flaring into action only when Lil's indifference provoked it. Furtherance of her pursuit was active only in the crises when she was forced to defend her virtue. Furtherance of both main pursuits was mainly passive.

*My Man Godfrey* takes us from an extremely active

furtherance of sympathetic pursuits into the passive.

Upon meeting Godfrey in her home, the girl he had backed into the ashpile the evening before became suddenly enamoured of one aim in life, to be lastingly revenged upon Godfrey for the humiliation she had suffered.

To get even with Godfrey the Vengeful One decided to get rid of him, ride him out of his new job, so she played upon a natural fear of a stranger in the house, and the chances of everybody in the family getting their throats cut while they slept.

Sensing the Vengeful One's purpose her flighty sister went into an hysterical tantrum, demanding that she be allowed to keep Godfrey, and she would not be mollified until she got her way. She did, rescuing Godfrey's job. And Godfrey tried to show his gratitude by being a "good" butler.

However, between the Flighty One in love with him, unwittingly compromising him in her solicitude over his well being, a maid fluttering over him, the Vengeful One trying to get him fired, then falling in love with him, a guest recognizing him as the scion of Boston millions, a fact he did not want known, trying to be a "good" butler was indeed trying.

Despite the difficulties of being a good butler in that wacky household, Godfrey kept right on at his butling, no one suspecting why. Nor was there much curiosity on that score. He looked and acted as though he needed a job badly, and his position as a menial dictated a passive conduct, so it was mainly up to the Vengeful One and her Flighty Sister to keep suspense up until Godfrey's college chum nearly let the cat out of the bag. Up to that point it was an extremely active furtherance of selfishness that gave the play its grip. Then mystery took hold. "Who," the audience asked, "was Godfrey?"

Then to the mystery of Godfrey's identity, and why one of his appointments should be butling, and why he had been living on the city dump, and how the pearls got into the bedsheets, let us add that other potent suspense building factor.

The Flighty One was clearly in love with Godfrey. But she was **flighty**; about as much help to him as the father in *The Three Smart Girls*, and if to the uncer-

tainty she caused we add the state of mind in which the Vengeful One put her parents when she aired the possibility of Godfrey, a stranger, cutting their throats while they slept, plus the uncertainty attending every utterance of the pixilated mother, plus the ever-imminent threat of exposure by Godfrey's well-meaning college chum, the whole totaled a sheaf of Damocles' swords hanging over Godfrey's noggin. Never knowing when one would drop, there was no opportunity for the audience to relax.

Godfrey, however, was one little man against five, a pixilated mother, a flighty and a vindictive daughter, a suspicious father and an inopportunately helpful college chum, and those odds tended more to increase sympathy than they did suspense. What then gave My Man Godfrey its constantly heightened grip?

We mentioned before that when a little man squares off to a big man sympathy for the little fellow is instantaneous. To pitch suspense at a height produced by evenly-matched battlers, the little fellow must further a cause (Godfrey was interested in the jobless) or fight with a skill far greater than that of the big fellow. When and if he does suspense heightens, but the pace at which he fights and the timing of his blows must be exceptional, or he must seem to possess that superior canniness or cunning and it is doubtful if anyone, even to this day, knows how Godfrey found out that the Vengeful One had planted the pearls in his mattress. Godfrey was indeed an alert hombre.

Godfrey's agility in ducking the sucker punch the Vengeful One planted when she hid the pearls in his mattress and his continued agility in fending curiosity over who he was, equalized matters, making My Man Godfrey a well-matched contest.

Mr. Deeds was the movie that popularized the word "pixilated", meaning a little off or "teched in the haid," but reaction to Mr. Deeds' misguided philanthropy was not suspended by pixilation in any of his aids or enemies.

The menace in Mr. Deeds Goes to Town was compounded first of that old-fashioned villainy that sneered, leered and cranked its lethal moustache in those early two-reel feature melodramas, and the villains were no less dastardly because they were air-condi-

tioned with a Harvard accent, streamlined with the latest thing in tailoring and chromium-zippered brief cases. Those cases contained deadly "weepons," concealed weapons of the law, as terrifying as any der-ringer ever leveled at the marcelled gourd of a brave and comely Civil War hero.

Those oily shysters trying to prove that Mr. Deeds was insane gave that movie its initial hold on the audience but the suspense curve did not begin to climb in earnest until Mr. Deeds turned sphinx, his stony silence in the face of all the court's pleading, progressively convicting him.

The audience and the female Judas who sold Deed's love for a headline understood Deed's hurt silence, but the court was completely in the dark. That situational element, or why Deeds would not defend himself, heightened suspense.

Strange to say, The Late Christopher Bean was never billed as a mystery, yet complete withholding accounted for much of its grip.

To get hold of the suddenly valuable paintings discovered in the possession of their maid was the one desire possessing the doctor's whole family. To keep the doctor and his family from getting those paintings was the maid's.

Many in the audience may have assumed that the paintings belonged to the maid, or the doctor, but no one had definite knowledge or information on that point.

Neither a legal nor a moral right was clearly established until the play ended. In fact, ownership was as much a mystery to the maid and the old doctor as it was to the audience until the maid unwittingly produced the ring with which the artist had married her, establishing title to everything he had left. Up to that point neither ring, nor marriage, was even vaguely implied. The ring came as a complete surprise, the answer, the solution to who owned the paintings.

As long as ownership was left in question, as long as that wedding ring dangled unseen in the maid's bodice, the suspense curve stayed up. Leaving the ring there kept suspense up. To that factor add the doctor's divided sympathies: Now for the maid and

now against her. Now with his family and now against them. Now with the broker and art critic, now against them, Jekyll and Hyde on the fence, the family's unremitting efforts to get, and the maid's to keep the paintings, mystery and a highly active furtherance of both pursuits providing the answer to Chris Bean's increasing grip.

In The Three Smart Girls, three girls, two boy friends, a butler incidentally, and the Count, six people in all, were combatting the appeal and cunning of an attractive and experienced fortune hunter and her mother; an alumna of the same school. Accordingly the ratio of opposition was 2 to 6 in favor of the three daughters, indicating another one-sided contest, but the inexperience and impetuosity of adolescence, the love-sick boy friends and the tipling Count, the divided loyalty of the father, the romantic and paternal struggling to possess him, with his millions and his age giving steam to the fortune hunter's siege, equalized things very neatly.

Keeping furtherance equal was helped by the fact that everybody the three sisters looked to for aid or cooperation proved unreliable: The Count failed them. One of their boy friends, the one who had conceived the idea of using the Count to lure the adventuress off was called out of town on business right at the moment he was needed most. The young Australian Lord, mistaken for the Count, purposely lending himself as bait to hook the siren, was too much in love with Joan to be of help to anyone, including himself.

Every attempt at childhood reminiscing failed to cool their Daddy's ardour and their last card, the police, serenaded by Penny into the idea that she was not lost—a ruse to separate the siren and her Daddy—also failed. But no sooner did one aid or idea fizzle out than another was sent into the fray. Aids were unreliable but numerous, succeeding each other so rapidly and with such smart timing, audience interest had no chance of flagging.

Because the unreliable character of the aids was well sustained, singularized a little higher every time a new scheme, plan or idea was launched, furtherance had to be extremely active on both sides. And an increasing grip was secured with practically no mystery.

In *It Happened One Night* one could hear bloodhounds barking on the back trail of the fleeing heiress and the newspaper reporter; headlines baying a large reward for their return and hounds of the law snarling from police car radios.

Like escaped convicts or hunted animals the pugnacious heroine and her reporter escort were kept constantly aware of the nearness and imminence of capture and when consciousness of the hounds was sidetracked by temporary refuge, then suspense was hiked by prying, self-appointed representatives of the law. As it happened, everybody they met considered themselves directly and personally responsible for law enforcement; as who doesn't at times.

From that moment on the night bus when the runaway heroine was recognized by a persistent masher and on through to the denouement, the audience was not allowed for more than a minute at the most to forget the yapping and sniffing of the hounds of law the nosiness of busybodies and the press.

What the two runaways were up against in the language of suspense-building, was delayed capture, much of which they were cleverly instrumental in causing.

Furtherance of both capture and escape was highly active. With capture deftly delayed, suspense was steadily heightened and with a minimum of mystery.

If the newlyweds in *Bad Girl* hadn't held out on each other that movie would have generated just about as much suspense as a bell ringing in a telephone exchange.

Intent upon making a living and providing a home for himself and his bride, troubled over the dwindling stake he had saved to start up in business, the young husband was too completely occupied to be aware of anything else. Wholly absorbed with the problem of keeping expenses down and making more money he seemed to her to be brutally insensitive to her pregnancy.

Because of her condition his preoccupation was easily translated into disappointment with her for having a child when they needed money so badly. So she withheld her secret; voiced her expectations to her girl friends, in fact, told everybody but her husband, the



one most vitally concerned.

When the husband learned finally and indirectly that he was to be a father, that the newcomer would place another drain upon his small capital, the sympathetic curve shot up and the suspense curve dived, but it rose again when he withheld from his wife any hint that he was going into the ring to win money so badly needed for her confinement. Both pursuits were furthered independently, making Bad Girl highly situational. The further the wife withdrew into the shell of her own fears the more the husband kept his hopes and fears to himself.

Because the wife in Street Scene feared the uncertain protection afforded by her neighbors, their dubious secretiveness, silences that bespoke her affair with the collector as loudly as anything they might have imparted openly, she excluded them from any knowledge of what was going on between her and her lover. In trusting no one, her affair became extremely clandestine. However, there was a lively consciousness of what was going on and the audience got a glimpse of her and the collector chatting together in an around-the-corner doorway, which dispelled much of the mystery.

Trying to interpret the glances and guarded remarks of neighbors, thwarted by an impenetrable hush the few times he appeared in their midst, and having no definite evidence of his wife's affair, the husband put off any attempt to surprise her and her lover together until he was quite certain they were together. Thus in putting off, watching, waiting, biding his time, delaying action, masking his suspicions and intentions, a strong passive furtherance increased suspense.

However, because there was a strong consciousness of the husband's intentions as well as the wife's affair, partial concealment took Street Scene still further out of the mystery division and into the situational.

The young hero in Holiday, engaged to the lovely daughter of the Wall Street tycoon, was sure of her love and love cinched speaks so volubly for itself that like the desire to live, anything said or done in its furtherance is gilding the lily. So the young man, like a card player with a royal flush, stood pat. And his fiancee, the social-career-minded daughter, quite

as sure of the young man's love as he was of hers, also stood pat, and obdurate.

Her sister, the rebel daughter, secretly in love with the hero went actively to bat for his desire to live, and realizing the appeal inherent in that pursuit, the father became just as active in furthering the business and social careers, or reverence for riches.

Thus we discover in both Street Scene and Holiday the chief protagonists remaining in the background, passively furthering their pursuits—husband and wife in Street Scene withholding and delaying; hero and heroine in Holiday standing pat—while secondaries—the daughter, her boss and the neighbors in Street Scene; the rebel daughter and the father in Holiday—kept their causes alive.

In other words, front line furtherance of the desire to live and the social careers, cheating and its apprehension, was extremely active while rear line furtherance was chiefly passive; both an active and passive furtherance doing their bit for suspense and almost simultaneously.

### Pace and Timing

Although suspense is in the main secured by a definitely active and passive furtherance, the pace at which pursuits are furthered accounts for much of a movie's grip.

There are many interesting theories regarding pace. One that tries to look final tells us Westerns, melodramas and gangster movies should be at a fast pace, mystery and detective plots, domestic and sex dramas at a moderate pace, also romance and character portrayals, while homespun or old-fashioned dramas and psychological themes should be leisurely paced, all pace as a qualifier depending upon the mood or tone the author is trying to achieve.

When determination of pace is based upon a mood the author wishes to achieve then prospects of an increasing grip is a one-to-one-hundred shot he won't get it, the producer taking all the gamble.

Tags like gangster, detective, historic, domestic, homespun, etc., are colorful and impressive, and fast, moderate and leisurely may give one a general idea of the rate of speed at which those movies should move

to heighten suspense, but those tags shed no light on the real meaning of pace as it applies to step by step build-up of suspense.

The pace at which a main pursuit in a great movie is furthered is first of all highly objective, and that means pacing has been alert to audience comprehension and ability to enlarge upon furtherance. A too fast pace and they won't get it and a too slow pace will cause the audience to fidget. In audience reaction to great movies the fidget curve is flat.

But along with a keen appreciation of audience ability to digest what's going on there's another important monitor of pace, a keen sense of audience tiring-point, a sense that knows exactly when the different variations of main pursuit furtherance have exhausted audience interest.

Still another good monitor of pace is a deep-rooted respect for audience apathy and restiveness, a factor prompting many scripters and directors to introduce variations of main pursuit furtherance well ahead of any chance of even the most restive audience getting fidgety.

Turning our attention to factors that govern pace within a movie itself we discover that motivation contains all the keys. Specifically, motivation in furtherance immediately opposing.

When the nature and character of opposing furtherance changes, so pace changes. Which disposes of the fast, moderate and leisurely pace theory for certain types of movies. For example:

Typical of young men in love the hero in *Holiday* was in a terrific hurry to get married. But the girl wasn't sure she liked his attitude toward life and living. So she gently applied the brakes. From there on furtherance of his idea of living was paced by furtherance of the business and social careers, furtherance of the careers in turn paced by the manner in which the hero furthered his desire to live.

In *Street Scene* we saw reaction to the wife's affair with the bill collector expressed in sly and malicious tongue-wagging. Fearing gossip, what it implied more than anything actually revealed, because talk was based entirely on what the neighbors suspected or imagined, the affair became furtive and guarded.

Thus gossip, or disapprobation of cheating paced cheating while the manner in which the wife conducted her affair paced the gossip, or furtherance of disapprobation.

When the sporadic fire of gossip let up then Communism blasted at Democracy and the hypocrisy of its marriage without love, and when Communism exhausted its ammunition a misunderstood swain dropped tender and subtle propaganda into the ear of the virgin daughter to undermine her defense of love unashamed, and when propaganda rested on its gains then a noisy blonde cut loose with an enfilade of contempt for all moral and social restraints and throughout that secondary action, lurking in the recesses of audience consciousness was the husband, spying and questioning, and when his quest threatened to exhaust interest then the infantry of gossip started sniping again from the street and this window and that in the tenement fronting the scene.

Street Scene was a sublime demonstration of sensitivity in timing variations of cheating and its apprehension, not only to keep gains and losses so delicately in balance defeat or victory for either side was never at any time predictable, but it was probably one of the best demonstrations of a high respect for audience apathy and restiveness ever seen on the screen.

## CHAPTER 5

### Nothing Can Keep You From Asking Why

Bad acting is often blamed for things illogical or unconvincing in a movie but a man owning an automobile in good running condition could protest his need of a new model with all the acting intensity and sincerity of a James Cagney or Spencer Tracy, and he would never be quite believable. **Why?** Because the new model is not essential to his happiness.

If there is any question regarding what it takes to make movies plausible the answer is largely contained in that word-WHY? Incidentally, a very annoying word. So annoying that scripters, directors and producers, following a hectic story conference, are quite often seen wandering aimlessly in the hills mumbling WHY? into their beards.

Yet there is no escaping the word if one would appreciate things that make great movies great. Probably the one word that can reveal truthfully the much ado about little and the little ado about much that so often strains audience credulity.

Asking why is merely asking for sufficient cause, reason, warrant, grounds or justification. When the answer is neither shallow, immature nor idle it is adequate, but adequate motivation isn't enough.

Acutely conscious of growing social, economic and political differences, audiences today are demanding **ample** motivation, and then some.

Ample motivation is found in totalling how badly characters want what they want, how badly they need or how fully they qualify or deserve the happiness they seek. Whether the ends they serve are worth while in view of their own circumstances or the needs of nature and civilization; whether they are over or under emphasizing those needs and desires and finally, whether the means or methods employed toward a realization of their ends are consistent with their capacity or ability to use them.

In short ample motivation means a total of many kinds of motivation: Primal, original, final, immediate, efficient and continuous, all of which quite often sums up into one kind, primal and final becoming original

motivation and original motivation supplying all of the immediate, efficient and continuous motivation needed.

Original motivation is contained in ends sought or furthered and primal or elemental reasons for furthering.

Another important factor adding to believability is found in the frequency tables or how often the main action in a movie occurs in real life. However, let us confine ourselves to original reasons for the time being, the probabilities later.

In *Bad Girl*, to be in business for himself was the hero's ambition, the girl wanting a home and husband and everything girls want from and with a husband. In *42nd Street* the director wanted to be tops in musical production. In *The Redheaded Woman* the heroine wanted her name in the village *Blue Book* and everything that went with that.

Ambition, getting ahead, romance, healthy, normal passions fired the principals in those movies, furnishing all the original and continuous motivation needed to make their pursuits convincing.

The director in *42nd Street* was called on to produce the greatest musical ever staged, a mammoth undertaking for one person, but having already produced a dozen or more hit musicals and having successfully handled as many temperamental casts, he was well equipped.

The radio-mechanic in *Bad Girl* was a skilled worker and pretended to nothing more than a shop of his own, an ambition not beyond his normal reach, but the redheaded clerk asked the impossible: Acceptance by small town socialites, her ambitions stonily ignored because she didn't belong; and she definitely barred herself when she seduced the leading merchant's son, breaking up his home.

Introductory action in *Over the Hill* revealed the mother a type happy only in serving others. Later, when children and in-laws showed she was not wanted in their homes, she took their indifference with the same tolerance and patience exhibited earlier; a fine understanding of their rights and their way of life and went right on loving them whether they wanted her around or not.

When *The Silver Cord* drew to a close the mother was resorting to trick, ruse and subterfuge to keep her

sons from marrying, exactly the means employed at the beginning.

Diamond Lil professed no passion in life other than adding the tall, dark and handsome mission chief to her collection of diamonds in the rough, to have and to hold until some handsomer diamond gleamed across her path.

When her lover escaped prison and threatened to kill her she used the same power to disarm him she used to get him, hold and disarm many others. Nothing could be more consistent with the nature and character of a Diamond Lil.

In Street Scene the husband was enough older than his wife, non-appealing, harsh and dictatorial enough to justify her philandering; that is, from the realistic point of view. Being a full-blooded female with an obvious capacity for affection it was in her nature to enjoy herself as that nature dictated; her nature and her husband providing the original and continuous reason for wanting someone who could be kind and gentle.

Madelon Claudet's past set a record of one kind or another in maturing but it was time well spent:

Not satisfied with giving her a cowardly lover, a thief for a husband, an illegitimate child and a prison record the author turned everyone who might have shown some little consideration into vinegar-souled censors and then, not satisfied with closing all doors to poor Madelon he barred her from all legitimate means of making a living, forced her into an underworld that paid grudgingly the bottom scale for its pleasures, condemned her to an atmosphere so starkly calloused it made gangsters and hopheads shudder with revulsion.

When her past finally took on a hue deep enough to condemn her in the eyes of the self-righteous she had a past that was a past, one that no woman, no matter how hardened to opinion, would care to acknowledge.

Picking pockets and going straight, the two main pursuits in The Miracle Man needed no original justification. Like the mating urge, self preservation, ambition and adventure, the need of money is universal, cause enough in itself to make its acquisition convincing. But that need in The Miracle Man was intensified when the pickpockets risked arrest and imprisonment to get it. The miracles were more than merely justified:

When the crippled boy threw away his crutches and the girl in the invalid chair got to her feet and the two walked unaided to the Miracle Man some fifty paces away they were moved by the hope of being made whole again, by the faith that had drawn them to the Miracle Man, and finally by the miracle staged by the pickpockets, by actually seeing a hideously twisted human made upright before their eyes.

The power to perform miracles had inspired a fake miracle and the faked miracle in turn inspired a genuine miracle. On the other hand if the Miracle Man had alone invoked enough faith to set those invalid feet moving, the audience would have looked askance at the whole business.

When the first assistant High Lama in Lost Horizon ushered the quaking refugees through the rock-arched doorway into the peaceful, sunlit valley of the Blue Moon, to the audience that happy landing spelled no more worries about payday, profits, taxes, the baby's measles, war and rumors of war. Shangri-la, they quickly learned, was a place where fear, greed, intolerance, prejudice, in fact all evils expressing man's inhumanity to man had been banished.

Whether anybody wants that kind of paradise, hopes for it or gives it much thought is a question Capra and Riskin did not try to answer. Enough it was they had symbolized adequately a world torn with hatred and greed and the fears kept alive by newspapers, politicians, charlatans and would-be dictators; the self-destroying lust for power and place the whole world would like to put behind just as Colman and his crowd put the menacing troops and the icy wastes of Tibet behind when they arrived in Shangri-la.

True the refugees probably had no idea of what they wanted in the way of happiness until they arrived safely in Shangri-la, but the author and director of Lost Horizon used up plenty of footage proving that life outside the Valley of the Blue Moon was the sort of thing nobody wanted.

People in the majority believe what they see, believe to be true what they want to believe, but in matters of hearsay, rumor or reputation they will always believe the worst, a trait that reacted very favorably in providing original cause for fearing the political-criminal liaison that kept the innocents in Ladies in the



Big House from getting evidence.

Newspaper exposes, in partially revealing political corruption, make that corruption doubly rotten in the imagination of the public. It was that newspaper fertilized consciousness that intensified the menace and evil in Ladies of the Big House.

In Mr. Deeds Goes to Town, Mr. Deeds wanted lady newspaper reporter and lady reporter wanted Mr. Deeds. Reporting made a wolf in she clothing out of the gal, yet where can a lady find better cause for betraying her sweetheart than duty and loyalty to one's newspaper? Where indeed if not in the love of a millionaire with a passion for tubas?

Compassion for jobless farmers made a sucker out of Mr. Deeds, but again, can one find a better cause? Hardly, unless one knows too much about farmers and most theatre-going folk don't know that farmers are people with all their virtues, toward and untoward.

Anyway, at this point, with the court inquiring into Deeds' sanity, the reader may notice that we are not taking motivation as seriously as we might, and that is exactly what everyone seriously interested in the movies should do as long as cause, reason, or justification presents a question. In fact, when cause appears the least insufficient he should regard everything projected with tongue tucked in the Southeast corner of his cheek. The movie that bids for a lasting, serious reaction with insufficient cause is kicking dust in his eyes.

With which we have arrived at the end and the beginning of two kinds of story treatment, the heavy and the light.

Just as there were movies that did not contain far-reaching inherent appeal so there are movies for which adequate motivation cannot be found, nor for which it is needed or desired. Such a movie was Mr. Deeds Goes to Town, openly questioning the mental stability of anyone who gives anything away.

My Man Godfrey presented another variation of the charitable impulse, treatment of which so many critics still insist on calling wacky, mainly because it stirred so much laughter. But never has a picture reached the screen with a finer Chaplin pathos—less obvious 'gags' and slapstick—and a depth no Chaplin comedy has

ever achieved; even the Gold Rush.

Shortly after Godfrey landed the job butling in the Flighty One's home she went into a fit of hysterics. Why? Because her sister tried to discredit Godfrey, tried to get him fired. But was that enough cause for a tantrum that looked for a moment like a first class psychopathic case? And the Vengeful One trying to get Godfrey fired because he had backed her into an ashpile on the city dump? Was that slight upset to her tin dignity cause sufficient for hiding a string of pearls in his mattress, accusing him of theft, threatening arrest and imprisonment?

What was the real reason for the pearl-planting? Obviously both girls were in love with Godfrey, ample reason for going on the make. And they were on the make. Then the tantrum and the pearl-planting were romance-motivated. Romance justifies most any kind of behavior.

Try and figure out a good reason for a man of Godfrey's bearing and deportment living among the jobless on a city dump? Strange, wasn't it? It came out later that Godfrey was experimenting in self-discipline, but much too late for the audience to seriously question his residence there. Nor did the director or author protest that residence.

Noble though Godfrey's interest in the unemployed and worthy his experiment, those pursuits were secondary to making good as a butler. Butling accentuated unselfishness, service to others, while petulance, the tantrum, the pearl-planting, retaliation, all expressing romance frustrated, accentuated selfishness.

Opening a night club on the dump, one way of getting the unemployed back to work was neither a striking nor a far-reaching solution of the unemployment problem, nor was it exemplary enough to lastingly impress the audience or the selfish family for whom Godfrey worked. My Man Godfrey was convincing because he kept within his own limitations in helping others.

At no time in *It Happened One Night* did the heiress and the newspaper reporter risk any serious consequences in running away. If they had been captured a luxurious home and a doting father awaited the girl. With the runaway story in the bag, the reporter was

assured of a good job on most any newspaper and probably a fat bonus.

For a moment the girl's desire to marry the titled gigolo and the reporter's need of a job held a very special importance but those ends were quickly subordinated by the budding romance, the need of funds, eluding the cops and evading questions. The job and the gigolo were merely an excuse for starting things off.

There was plenty of immediate cause for enduring financial embarrassment, hunger and the night the runaways spent in the open. However, those milder inconveniences marked the extremes to which author and director went in making the flight difficult. Had they made it much tougher amusement might have turned to ridicule. *It Happened One Night* contained basically the appeal inherent in *Orphans of the storm*, the main pursuits treated for laughs.

In *Theodora Goes Wild* there was no tenable excuse for all the hub-bub aroused by the serialization of Theodora's book and that's why, at the indignation meeting in her home town, the dirty looks and horrified gasps provoked so much laughter. The sound and fury was palpably much ado about nothing.

With that furore quickly dying out, what then was Theodora's excuse for dashing breathlessly off to New York to see her publisher? The shelving of the local serialization did not seriously affect the income from her book!

True the artist who designed the cover for her book fell in love with her at first sight, a good reason for following her back home. But looked at rationally what about the threat to expose her unless she got him a job gardening for her Aunt; tending a patch of lawn a school kid would be glad to mow for two bits?

That business of hitching his dog to the lawnmower and boldly passing the time of day over the fence with ladies to whom he had never been introduced? The audacity of the man; the unmitigated gall. And to top things off he whistled a monotonous ditty from the woodshed, in the still of the evening, an obvious signal to Theodora to come out in the moonlight, or into the woodshed or something; provoking Theodora to a discordant protest on the piano that deafened the whole

household and ended in the crashing of a window and the squooching of an innocent tabby's tail in the door. For what? WHY? Because he was in love.

What about that Sunday fishing trip? Shocking respectable townspeople in that manner? And that declaration of love Theodora hurled into the very teeth of the villagers? And then, just when one expected Theodora to return to her senses, conduct herself in a manner seemly for a maiden lady of careful rearing, what did she do?

She gallumphed off to New York, moved into the artist's apartment, decked herself out like a mammoth peacock and summoned a squad of newspaper reporters.

Why did the author and director put Theodora and the artist up to those appalling shenanigans? To force the artist's publicity-fearing family into letting go of her man? Yes, that was one reason. But the better reason was an absence of any real reason for all the turble-burly in the first place.

Three sisters, Kay, Joan and Penny, eighteen, nineteen and thirteen years respectively, were discovered sailing on a lake in Switzerland. That was the opening scene in *The Three Smart Girls*.

A dinner horn sounding, they raced for shore to find their mother at the table brooding and unresponsive. Plied with questions, the mother abruptly left the table, in tears. Puzzled, the girls mutely inquired the cause and their governess produced it, a New York newspaper announcing their father's engagement to a fortune hunter. Questioned again their mother finally confessed the hope their father would one day come back to them.

Deeply touched the sisters talked things over and hit upon a plan to get Daddy back. With the help of their governess they packed off to New York and pounced in on him having lunch with the siren. Suspecting their purpose the siren behaved badly, showed pique and annoyance.

Later, unburdening herself to her mother the siren was chided for bad behavior and that evening the mother got a chance to show just how she would have handled the three nuisances. She gushed over them, but wise to her strategy they exasperated her to the point where she too expressed her honest opinion.

However, Penny overdid things and for her rudeness was sent off to her room, while the siren, triumphant, sang and played for her Daddy. But Penny got back at her with vengeance to spare. She thumped beds around in the room directly over the piano, drowning out the siren's seductive voice.

To improve upon that doubtful victory the girls upon retiring reminisced over childhood pranks to get a tighter grip on Daddy's heartstrings, but their cuteness and cleverness was all for naught. Next day the fortune hunter persuaded Daddy to send the girls back to Europe.

In pure desperation they appealed to Bill Evans, their Daddy's young investment manager. Taking one look at Kay he leaped to the rescue. He knew of a bona fide Count, a drunkard who for enough cash might be persuaded to lure the siren away. And Bill had everything fixed, when, curses be, he was sent out of town on a business trip.

But you couldn't stump Bill. He instructed the Count to go to a certain night club with a theatre program of bizarre design under his arm, a device that would identify him to the three girls, and serve as their cue to introduce him to the fortune hunter.

The Count arrived at the night club allright, and on time, but a drinking partner lured him off and the program was carelessly left on a stool at the bar, a wealthy young Australian Lord picking it up.

Mistaken for the Count the Australian Lord was pounced upon by Joan who dragged him forthwith to the fortune hunter's table. But the young Lord insisted upon dancing with Joan, who, falling for him, reluctantly reminded him that the fortune hunter, not she, was the siren he was supposed to make love to.

Playing for time to get better acquainted with Joan the young Lord accepted his new identity and promised to make a date with the siren the next day, then promptly forgot all about the date to take Joan for a stroll in the park.

While strolling with Joan the siren waited for him in a hotel grill, their prearranged rendezvous, and while this strolling and waiting business was going on Joan's Daddy phoned the siren and was told by her mother she was ill, so Daddy hopped right over to his love's

apartment and was listening to her mother's explanation of the siren's absence when the siren walked in on them, madder than a wet hen at being stood up by the young Lord.

Smelling a rodent, or a rival, Daddy insisted they be married at once. Next day the headlines screamed the announcement, and the three smart daughters faced an empty handed return to Switzerland and their mother. Joan was of course blamed for the crackup. Then Penny, the youngest, decided to act.

That night there was another sentimental family gathering and the evening wound up with Penny cozening her Daddy into letting her sleep on a couch in his bedroom, claiming that she was afraid to sleep alone. He awoke next morning to find her gone, just as she had planned. But the ruse failed.

An energetic police broadcast quickly rounded Penny up. She insisted she was an opera singer, not a lost child, and to prove it turned a trained voice loose on the police station but the Sergeant was wise, hard-boiled and duty-minded. He returned her to her father.

In the meantime, Joan had given her Australian Lord the air for bungling his date with the siren. Realizing he would lose Joan unless he acted quickly he immediately phoned the fortune hunter, giving her a honeyed alibi for standing her up.

Placated, the siren met him again and he showed her three passages booked on a liner to Europe, "one for her, one for her mother and one for himself," adding as a clincher "that his happiness depended upon her going," failing to add "without him."

With those tickets in hand and believing they had hooked a bigger fish the fortune hunter's mother deliberately provoked an argument with the father of the three smart girls, taking him to task for his failure to send them back to their mother. The resultant clash gave the fortune hunters an excuse to skip off to the boat and their young Lord.

Of course everyone was happy at getting rid of them, everybody but Joan, and sympathy for her over the loss of her young Lord got so thick she fled their presence just as he popped into the house and into her arms. The picture ended with everybody at the pier welcoming the girl's mother, their Daddy making a noble effort to look joyous.

The brief glimpse the audience got of the mother at the beginning of the picture did not warrant any great amount of sympathy. Therefore, the original expedition, and mother wanting the father back, took on no serious coloring. Along with that the mother and the three girls were luxuriously provided for. Therefore, any reason for wanting the father back had to be purely sentimental.

Knowing that two old people separated ten years have little in common outside of their love for their offspring, that defeat or victory for the girls or the father's cause carried no serious consequences, that noble and sentimental crusades require ample cause the author and director decided to give *The Three Smart Girls* the lighter handling.

In Christopher Bean an art critic, one whose opinion carried weight with brokers, ran the value of the paintings the family found in the possession of their maid, up into five figures. An art broker verified the critic's appraisal with an eagerness to lay cash on the line that was hard to repress. Thousands of real American dollars were in prospect, enough money to drive a less principled fellow than the old doctor to chloroform or brass knuckles to get the paintings.

Once the value of the paintings was boosted to a figure that meant wealth, the family suddenly discovered a need of things they had never dreamed of having before; luxuries suddenly becoming necessities. With their demands increasing beyond all proportion to actual needs the more determined they were to get, and the maid to keep those paintings, the more provocative of laughter.

The two main pursuits in *Holiday* were the desire to live and business and social careers, the hero's prospective father-in-law offering him the opportunity of a life time to get into Wall Street as his protege. The father was one of the Biggies in the Street and his offer meant millions, but the young man turned it down. Why?

For years play had been denied him, work was all he had ever known, and he was beginning to wonder if life meant nothing more than just piling up money. He had earned, he needed and he deserved a holiday.

The young man's fiancee wanted him launched on a

business career. Why? Because money and a Wall Street rating were necessary to her career, her social future, the two careers, social and business being naturally complementary. But why did she oppose his desire to live for a few short years? Because that desire was too much in the abstract, not tangible enough to the furtherance of business and social careers.

Her father knew the boy had earned a holiday yet insisted on his giving it up. Why? Because his own son was not the type who could carry on for him and it was high time he found some one. He was getting no younger and the hero had executive stuff, had demonstrated it by building a few shares of stock into a \$30,000 bankroll.

The fiancee and her rebel sister were very much in awe of their father, so fearful of him that immediately the young man was ushered into their massive apartmented mansion, and the intention to wed made known, the girls went into a tense huddle over just how they would break the news to father. The sister suggested church as the safest place; the father wouldn't talk in church.

Thus before anyone got a glimpse of the father he was built up in audience imagination as a man whose favor had to be astutely curried. Why? Because the father was just that, a man to reckon with; the type that commands unquestioning obedience.

In fact he bore out their estimate so well, everything said and done subsequently in furtherance of the careers and the desire to live was tempered by their awe of him. Because of the father's personality and background every move made in furtherance of both pursuits had to take his opinion and his wishes into consideration.

Although the old tycoon did not come out and say in so many words that he wanted the young man to eventually look after and add to the family's far flung investments in mill, mine and utilities, preservation of his dynasty was the big idea. What he emphasized was an opportunity for the young man to better himself; but time off from what he had been doing day in and day out held for the young man a promise of self-betterment far more alluring.



Reason for the desire to live could not under any circumstances be made as alluring as the advantages and rewards of business and social careers. Why? Because those advantages were in evidence everywhere one looked. The careers were in process of realization, visible, present, while the desire to live was in the anticipation, in the wanting, making the business and social careers—pursuits relatively non-appealing—convincing contenders for audience sympathy.

Now to prove the importance of ample motivation, visualize the father with a son thoroughly capable of carrying on for him, his daughter's young man with no reason for his "desire to live" other than the \$30,000 he had earned, or visualize the atmosphere in the tycoon's home, gay and sophisticated, not profound in its reverence for riches.

So the answer to ample motivation or the things that make a movie believable lies in keeping alive, vital and important the things that originally stand in the way of what the principals want as well as original reasons for furthering their wants.

Lack of a good original reason for wanting what's wanted accounts for the failure of too many otherwise good movies. For one, there was a Cinderella in the tenderloin; a torch warbler in a dive.

She hankered fine feathers and the rarefied atmosphere of the higher social perches, and lo-o-o—— one day there appeared a genii in the form of an intellectual philanderer who gave her an opportunity to be a lady; not for just a day, not for just two days but for two whole weeks. Why? Because her benefactor had a perverted sense of humor.

He wanted to see if a torch singer in a dive could really be a lady without the servants getting wise; and as it happened later they were the only ones who did and being good sports smoothed the way for her. Then a poor but honest postman offered Cindy love'n everything in a cottage where the clock would never strike twelve and she turned him down for wealth, pomp and snobbery. WHY?

The answer to that one is one of the answers to why the popularity of many personally likable stars is waning; stars who might be in the ascendant if more movie-goers were writing in to studios and asking

WHY? when there is no good or adequate reason for heroines doing the things they do.

The heroine's ambition to be a somebody was good but the method by which she attained the higher level was so wide open to question the longer she proceeded upon that puerile base the more she undermined any reason for remaining up there.

Incidentally, stars would not appear at a disadvantage nearly so often if their producers would take the sadistic experiments of intellectual philanderers as lightly as the audience.

When, as in that picture, the socialite threw up his hands in horror upon discovering he had married "one of those persons"—stars cast in the role of "those persons" being invariably fine mannered birds themselves—the audience was forced to ask if the fellow's taste was entirely in his mouth. That particular Cinderella was Joan Crawford; and imagine anyone scorning marriage to "that type?" The realities of casting made a liar out of everybody opposing her. And, finally, if she was that type, catapulting her from a dive to the drawing room of an aristocrat was in open defiance of the greater probabilities.

### **The Greater Probabilities!**

Once upon a time there was a stage play in which the hero cleaned and flushed sewers beneath the streets of Paris. His name was Chico and through the magic influence of a good priest he was suddenly elevated from sewer flushing to street washing.

Now that promotion was in itself a very remarkable thing, because once a sewer flusher in Paris, always a sewer flusher, unless a sewer flusher can show unusual qualifications for street flushing and it so happened that this Chico was a very remarkable fellow. You had his word for it.

Chico believed in himself. And the American audience did not jeer at his boasting because in America one's profession at any level is as much a badge of honor as it is in France, and not to be taken too lightly; one of the reasons why Seventh Heaven clicked so solidly and resoundingly with American audiences. In fact, Seventh Heaven's success on Broadway resounded so loudly they heard it way out in Hollywood, Cali-

fornia, and Seventh Heaven was forthwith adapted to the screen. And when the nation's critics saw Seventh Heaven in the movies they called it one of the ten best pictures of that year.

Seventh Heaven won critical hearts despite the fact that Chico's role was filled with a "very superior and non-sewer-flushing type of actor," demonstrating quite conclusively that scripting and directing can get admirable results under terrific handicaps when the character's ambitions are kept within the greater probabilities.

Chico's rise to street flushing was well within the greater probabilities, that is to the average person, but not to Chico. To become one with that very exclusive fraternity of street flushers was to him a dream just a bit beyond the realm of possibility. Yet Chico never actually gave up hope of becoming a street flusher and he let everyone within hearing know that one day he would be a street flusher. But it seemed the more he voiced his aims and qualifications the farther away his goal, until finally in sheer despair he came right out for atheism, even going so far as to walk boldly into the vestibule of the Church to defy God. That was how the priest came to learn about Chico.

Perhaps Chico was sly and then perhaps he was honest when he told the good priest he had become an atheist because God had too long failed to recognize his very special talents as a street flusher. And whether the Priest was sly, or merely discerning, he saw to it that Chico became a street flusher and that rise fixed the height of every major upward movement in Seventh Heaven from then on. By that we mean that Chico finally attained his Heaven by highly probable stages.

The point is, Chico was not appointed Street Inspector, nor did he nurse any vain longings for that job, nor did he marry the Mayor's daughter, nor was he commissioned Captain for conspicuous bravery at the front. In short, there were no miracles of promotion in Seventh Heaven and that, this writer believes, accounted in a great measure for Seventh Heaven's phenomenal success and also marked a gradual decline of miraculous rises and promotions of movie heroes to power and prominence.

Then too, the decline may have been due to the disillusioning process setting in shortly after the big war, but regardless of cause, during the era of movie miracles, most heroes wore Seven League Boots and plucked off big jobs like Donald Duck gathering edelweiss.

Rare indeed was the week that passed without a Hollywood success story that did not parallel the sudden rise of its author, who had too quickly forgotten his long years of hacking and hocking to hold body and soul together, the unfeeling rebuffs and the world's indifference to his genius and the small part luck really played in his success.

The author's story was the story of one-in-a-million but it actually happened to him, didn't it? So everything he evolved savored of the miraculous and when plausibility was questioned, when told that even Ripley passed up those newsboy-to-president blurbs, he fell back on the old argument that the movie audience wanted none of the long, hard struggle. They wanted **escape from the realities.**

"Besides, he insisted, "there isn't a mother living who does not believe that one day her son will be rich and powerful."

During the era of Cabin-boy-to-Admiral, Up-from-the-Ranks-to-President-of-the-Firm-movies, the Good Fairy and her Magic Wand sat a firm and defiant saddle on the box office. Prince Charming and Cinderella rode high and wide and without a challenge. From rags to riches, from gutter to penthouse, from soup ladle to scepter was supposed to be the dream of every girl that ever sneaked a peek at the last page of a movie star's diary and who dared take issue?

For the frustrated, inhibited, unhappily married women, for the girl doing over last year's dresses, what would life have been without the hopes held forth by those Prince Charmings come to life in the movies?

Remember the servants lined up all the way from the big Greek urn in the grand archway to the foot of the grand stairway to greet the new mistress who, only the night before, was that little blonde nobody over in the notions?

Remember the Prince's family and friends gathered 'round to look through Cinderella with so many beautiful girls present and competing they made the

Prince's quest for the one-and-only girl look like a search for money in the mint?

Remember Cindy receiving a few hurried instructions on the difference between a salad fork and a bell rope and then queening it around the ancestral halls with all the grace of a charm school graduate? And Cinderella played by a star so finished in the social graces she couldn't look out of place receiving the Duke of Windsor? And, incidentally, what a break for the agent of the Good Fairy when the Duke married a girl whose aunt used to run a boarding house. But let's get on.

Remember the snooty mater, the uppity sister and the lecherous "friend of the family" making life for poor Cinderella completely and utterly unbearable? And Cindy finally razzing the whole tiaraed tribe into a state of utter abashment, and then, her integrity intact, returning to her own kind where the long but clean and honestly earned underwear whipped in the tail wind of an Elevated Express, and Prince Charming, scorning his family's filthy millions for that swell corned beef and cabbage Cindy's mother made?

Remember that audacious Cindy? So cute and fetching the Prince's family fell all over itself apologizing for their original objections; mainly because Cindy was their one and only hope of straightening the Prince out; he having met Cinderella originally on the convalescent end of a three month binge?

Remember?

For the last fifty years the Village Bleat and the Metropolitan Blat have conducted society pages as aloof from the rest of their make-up as a prize Borzoi in the city pound. And the masses have always read the newspapers.

Ever conscious of that social chasm, was it possible the majorities believed that sons of wealth could find no desirable mate in the Blue Catalog? That the good girls, the dream girls, were all below stairs or living in a walk-up over on Tenth Avenue?

It wouldn't be so bad if those matings were concocted tongue in cheek, or, when they let a Phi Beta Kappa look with favor upon a Tappa Kegga Beer they would not in over-anxious explanations admit they were off on the wrong foot. But Joe Bigelow in Var-

iety pictures very neatly that particular deficiency in scripting:

"The marriage of the rich young man to his mother's servant girl is not nearly as shocking as the synthetic situations and overstressed plight of the boy and girl would have it appear. The point overlooked entirely by the authors is that if there were more servant girls like Loretta Young, home would not only be sweet but also hot.

"The dialog bends itself into knots pointing out the fact that there is a profound difference between a millionaire and a maid, and then after making a serious problem of it, turns around and seeks to solve and salve with a courtroom twist and hammock finish that lack both reason and conviction. The marriage is a rather simple affair between two young people who love each other and not badly written or conceived but the complications quickly get under way and crab the works. There's a despicable butler who exacts kick-backs from the help and who tries to put the grab on the new household looker, and the family opposition to the marriage and the framing of the girl for annulment purposes and the baby. And this time the baby is legit."

Why is it when the situation is reversed, when Princess Charming drags home the poor but honest hero and he refuses financial or any other kind of help there are no explanations? Is there anyone who doesn't know the answer? If there is let him come up before the class and have his nose knuckled. Very good, then.

If the girl starred as a millionairess or Princess Charming was a type who could admire a man who accepted help from a woman and the man featured along with her was the type that accepts help from a woman, the audience wouldn't care very much for either.

Not that men do not or should not accept help from women. If there is an honest and sufficient reason for doing so, they should, and as long as that condition is satisfied or self-evident, neither the writer, director nor the actors need feel uncomfortable about Miss Somebody marrying Mr. Nobody. And that applies as well to Mr. Somebody who loves a servant.

As Bige said: "The marriage of a millionaire to a

maid was a rather simple affair between two young people in love with each other." And in view of the fact that camera and its yeomen gave that romance a high degree of reality it wasn't at all necessary to apologize for the difference in social status. That difference constantly and vividly in evidence wasn't trying to fool anyone. However, those social bridges are so rarely crossed, perhaps all of us are overlooking something.

The idea is, when the Cinderella formula becomes sensitive to the greater probabilities and makes a real effort to be as honest about their scripting as Seventh Heaven, Cinderella and Prince Charming will take on a new and far more palatable coloring for the audience, the captious as well as the credulous audience

As for Cinderella's chances of ever again rating the popularity she once enjoyed, that is a brooding question.

We cannot deny the world has passed through a seven-year drenching of reality that has left an odor of banana oil on every nostrum and ideal conceived by the imagination of man.

With class immutabilities accentuated as never before in the history of human differences there should be no surprise if the audience looks with jaundiced eye when that little blonde nobody over in the notions assumes she has a chance with the assistant manager's son, let alone the millionaire playboy.

In dramatizing the genius, the prodigy, the sweepstakes winner, the inheritance of millions or anything that actually happens as infrequently as those miracles do in real life, the producer's best bet is to glue cap and bells on the author's Magic Wand. And now what of Prince Charming, Santa Claus and Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp in the better movies? They're as rare as a royal flush.

In Ladies of the Big House, Prince Charming turned out to be a lonesome engineer with a Soviet contract in his pocket, a young man killing time in the big city until his boat left for Russia and Cindy was no naive or impoverished nobody. She operated a flower shop and she knew all the answers, as the engineer quickly learned when he tried to date her.

What he wasn't aware of was a gangster threatening

to kill anyone who took Cinderella out and the only thing that saved the Prince was the timely intrusion into their honeymoon apartment of a detective looking for that gangster. The detective got the bullet intended for the Prince and to protect the gangster, a power in politics, the Prince and Cinderella were railroaded to prison.

Mr. Deeds was a one-in-a-million guy. He inherited that much but he neither wanted a million dollars nor did he need it, and to prove his indifference to a million, he proceeded to get rid of it as fast as the law would let him.

The hero in Holiday turned down a bona fide opportunity to eventually make many times a million dollars and there was nothing hasty in his decision, nor was there any indifference to money or any contempt for millions, or millionaires. In fact, the temptation to make a million was so great he was persuaded finally to try for one, but the effort was no go. You see, he had thirty thousand dollars he had earned himself but what is thirty thousand when there's thirty million in the offing? Ask any one of more than a hundred million people who never had thirty thousand dimes just what thirty thousand dollars is. But turning down a chance to make a million? How foolish. Perhaps, but then that sort of thing happens only in the better movies.

Wonderful Lamps were rare in the movies we have reviewed, and only one, My Man Godfrey, put any strain on credulity in the Robin Hood manner. But Godfrey's producer, like Mr. Deeds', put no emphasis on the plausibility of the hero's pursuit or its purpose. Both movies scored a good moral with no undue protestations.

Why Godfrey had to go to a City dump to find himself wasn't protested. His reason for being there was withheld, the audience given little opportunity to criticize or question. Incidentally, Godfrey made a neat job of teaching the Vengeful One there was no percentage in trying to get even with people, and a good time was had by all, and another Godfrey as sensitive to the probabilities will be most welcome.

Getting back to Cinderella, there may be a question as to just how many frustrated ladies lose themselves



in dreams of snaring a monied Casanova, and on that point the writer has practically no information at all. But he can produce statistics showing millions of unattached females with that certain healthy sparkle in their eyes, that feeling of well-being in their gait; millions of women, who, though scrappily married, wouldn't trade their men in on the best looking guy that ever brought in a gusher; millions of stenographers who think the sun rises and sets in their boy friends, whether they have jobs or not; more statistics showing that the number of Goldwyn lookers and Warner Goldiggers who married bond-clippers just about equals the number of stenographers, maids and waitresses who have married guys who can afford chauffeurs and valets. And if there is no particular point in such observations perhaps the fact that Cinderella and Prince Charming have been consistently snubbed at the annual awardings may carry some weight. As for Santa Claus, the following critique by one of Variety's scanners gives a pretty fair idea of Kris Kringle's operations within the field.

"Again it is Christmas Eve (there are three Christmas Eves in the story) and the girl is alone in a barn with only a kerosene lamp. It's snowing and there's money hidden in the barn. One of the crooks is an ex-doctor and he officiates as obstetrician at the birth of the girl's child. Then the revenge-eager tough guy goes Santa Claus and returns \$20,000 in bonds in order that the rich man's son jailed under an alias can be cleared. It's all on the Santa Claus motif and the pretty little tongue-in-cheek fadeout has one of the crooks going wistful about 'Peace on earth, good will to men' and winding up asking "what town are we in, anyhow?" Camera then picks up sign: 'You are now leaving Bethlehem'. That's being subtle with a sledgehammer. Outline of the story gives a pretty good idea why some of the cast could not shine very lustroously." (Land).

## CHAPTER 6

### Stars

When, finally, movie actors began to talk, audience likes and dislikes regarding stars became very pronounced, the girl or boy running a temperature over Pat O'Brien or Joan Blondell becoming very impatient of types like Robert Taylor and Joan Bennett.

Liking this star or disliking that one is of course quite natural, and also pretty general, but extremely detrimental to any fair or useful estimate of a star's personal appeal or his suitability for a role. However, personal likes and dislikes might be tempered if one could give one's favorite star an impartial or dispassionate appraisal, but easy as that sounds, it rarely works out.

Sometimes a spiritual, mental and physical once-over is offered to prove how completely and utterly detached or impersonal we actually are, but in the end that kind of scanning always discloses so many special likes and dislikes, the best we can say for it is, it is not impartial.

Starting with the physical, we meet up with the adoring crowd that ignores or denies anything but spiritual appeal in stars like Janet Gaynor and Anita Louise, fans totally blind to curves, disclaiming emphatically that those two ladies are shapely or desirable.

True that any desire awakened by the Misses Louise and Gaynor is a gentle and protective thing, while Joan Blondell and Alice Faye arouse a more lusty and possessful animal, but gentle or lusty, it is sex appeal just the same. After all, that young man in State Fair was interested in something more than Janet Gaynor's skill at churning butter.

In seeking star types dominantly spiritual or obviously lacking in sex appeal there are but two likely prospects; Charlie McCarthy and Donald Duck, and there seems to be justifiable suspicions regarding Charlie.

Absence of sex appeal, if any, is found only in supporting types, not among stars, all stars possessing a healthy amount of IT. If they don't author and director with the aid of seductive make-up, costuming, dialog and business, supply it.

As for mental types, neither out-and-out faculty types, professor and dean, nor stupid nor credulous types ever achieve stardom. Those types, like juveniles, ingenues, comedians, racial and dialect, sinister and saintly, city and country, stamped and dated types, become featured or supporting people.

A few character actors like Beery, Arnold, Laughton, Huston, Arliss and Muni are of course starred, but their appearances with the exception of Beery and Arnold are rare.

The stars we are interested in are romantic leads, those who entertain us the year 'round, none of whom with rare exceptions are extreme types, yokel or slicker, obviously feline, highly sensual, insensitive, intellectual or saintly. If at times they appear exceedingly brilliant, compassionate, seductive or courageous it is their role or their background and costuming that makes them so.

However, at this stage of movie appreciation we are not interested in star roles or backgrounds, or anything that enhances a star's personal appeal. The order is reversed. We want to know now what he has as a person and a trouper that enhances his role or pursuit, how much his personality and his talent as an actor adds to the singularity of his pursuit.

Therefore the question: If a star's spiritual, mental and physical qualities do not fix his personal appeal or his suitability for a role, what does?

Assuming that a star's voice and delivery enhance his singularity as a person, as an individual, then his suitability for a given role is determined in qualities inherent in his personality that induce sympathy, add to suspense and make him believable, the three major objectives of entertainment.

Charitable qualities fix his appeal; non-charitable his non-appeal. Inscrutable qualities fix his ability to grip an audience, hold it in suspense. And whatever there

is in a star's personality that stamps and dates him, marks the time and place in which he appears to be most at home, adds to his believability. The total determines his flexibility, which in turn fixes his suitability for a given role, or the extent to which he can enhance the singularity of his role or his pursuit.

As an aid to appreciation of star flexibility let us group stars according to period and locale, occupations and diversions they might pursue gracefully, those groupings to begin with types having a balance, purity and perfection of features that separate them conclusively from all plain, rugged and earthy, man-and-woman-on-the-street types.

### Group One

Robert Taylor	Greta Garbo
Tyrone Power	Katherine Hepburn
John Boles	Rosalind Russell
Frederic March	Anita Louise
Franchot Tone	Olivia De Haviland
Fernand Gravet	Loretta Young
Errol Flynn	Andrea Leeds

In the foregoing group we have the lord and lady, knight and crusader, dandy and belle, pirate and buccaneer, legendary Shakespearean, lineage aristocrat, younger royalty and ruling classes of remote times as well as the present; revolutionary and civil war upper classes, genteel, elegant, frail, fragile, delicate, ethereal, spiritual, esthetic, ideal, heroic and noble types.

Group one may on occasion be placed with the following group or types discovered in continental watering places, Monte Carlo, the Riviera; rouleteers, bacarateers, cosmopolites, continentals, devotees of sport in the grand manner, international intriguants, secondary diplomats, racial, exotic and erotic types.

### Group Two

Ronald Colman	Myrna Loy
Herbert Marshall	Gail Patrick
Melvyn Douglas	Dorothy Lamour
William Powell	Virginia Bruce
Warner Baxter	Dolores Del Rio

Granting that group one is flexible enough to carry on convincingly in backgrounds and pursuits suitable to group two, with few exceptions the locales and periods suitable for group two marks the extent of group one's flexibility.

### Group Three

Cary Grant	Norma Shearer
George Brent	Joan Bennett
Robert Montgomery	Eleanor Powell
Ray Milland	Carole Lombard
Bryan Aherne	Joan Crawford

Group three suggests the American sophisticate, more metropolitan than cosmopolitan, the smart set, the fashionables of New York, Chicago and San Francisco, the Mayflower crowd, night life, yachting and bridle-path types, exponents of the mode.

Flexibility of group three is, of course, restricted to activities and locales suggested but with adequate motivation are not out of place with the cosmopolites or Group Two.

### Group Four

Gary Cooper	Janet Gaynor
Joel McCrea	Sylvia Sidney
Richard Dix	Jeannette MacDonald
Chester Morris	Grace Moore
Clark Gable	Irene Dunne
Spencer Tracy	Barbara Stanwyck

Group four suggests the earthy, recognized as such in direct contrast with the esthete, sophisticate, the cosmopolite and the metropolites. They are not however so much salt-of-the-earth as an idealization of earthy, plain or rugged types; the more picturesque doers and leaders in mill, mine and field; in trade, commerce, education or sports; given more to action than argument. However, all stars are in a sense aggressive types.

The following group reflects the man and woman in the street or as the Hungarians say: "The kind of which there are the most."

### Group Five

Fred Astaire	Ginger Rogers
George Raft	Joan Blondell
Bing Crosby	Ann Sothorn
Pat O'Brien	Alice Faye
James Cagney	Claire Trevor
Dick Powell	Joan Davis
Henry Fonda.	Martha Raye

The following group or Group Six comprises secondary composites, secondary because in the main they are plain types, neutral and protean enough to handle remote as well as present day lead roles in any locale. without the aid of crepe hair, putty and spirit gum.

### Group Six

Fred MacMurray	Luise Rainer
Miriam Hopkins	(without the accent)

### Group Seven

James Stewart	Jean Arthur
Leslie Howard	Helen Hayes
(without the accent)	Bette Davis

Group seven comprises the extremely flexible composites, types neither plain nor particularly esthetic, stamped with neither the city nor the country, nor dated, yet flexible enough to hold their own in those extremes and in any period, activity or locale in between, contemporary, moderately remote or extremely remote.

Exceptions will be taken to the preceding classifications; particularly to that of Joan Crawford, Norma Shearer and Carole Lombard; Norma Shearer's because of her work in *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Barrets of Wimpole Street*, two plays supposed to demonstrate her extreme flexibility; but her roles, that of the invalid, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Juliet, clashed so radically with the true Shearer personality her talent as an actress served only to accentuate the bad casting.

The transcendent character of Juliet and the "fswail and fswagile" quality attributed to Miss Shearer by the lisping cousin in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* was

just a bit too much for her to deliver without a wide-spread challenge. In *The Divorcee*, *Smilin' Thru*, and *Private Lives* she was given an opportunity to be herself and came through with flying colors.

Carole Lombard and Joan Crawford are at their best when portraying Carole Lombard and Joan Crawford, as are most stars, and as themselves belong in the groups to which they have been assigned, which if questioned may be checked by placing ethereal, or fashionable types in the earthy, plain, rugged or man-and-woman-on-the-street groups or vice versa.

Incidentally, when in doubt regarding types and how they should be grouped a thorough scanning of both oral and ocular, sight as well as vocal qualities, will help to set one straight. Voices singularize personalities as well as fixed ocular qualities.

In grouping stars as we have, we cannot be too squeamish or we may find ourselves in a situation similar to Robert Benchley's when he lectured on how to identify criminal types.

Seeking the perfect type of arch-criminal Mr. Benchley had an artist make a composite picture of a neo-cephalic forehead type of criminal and a sub-eurythmic chin type which turned out to be a perfect likeness of Robert Benchley himself.

In short, no single facial characteristic, mouth, eyes, chin, nose or forehead is sufficiently indicative of character in a star to type a star, those characteristics singly and severally of no practical help in objective casting, no indication of the sympathy a star is able to provoke or induce as a type, or the extent to which he can mystify or excite.

In other words, physiognomy, the science of reading character or disposition into the lineaments of face or form of body, produces nothing but complications, petty contradictions and confusion. Casting as a laboratory problem is no good. Sensing character and disposition intuitively and verifying results by direct comparison with groups of strongly similar characteristics is the best procedure.

In fact, if we would get anywhere in fixing the flexibility of stars they should be viewed in direct contrast with each other and several groupings. For example, Olivia DeHaviland, the lower part of her face is graced

with a passionate mouth, the upper highly intelligent and spiritual and only in placing her in several groups singularly spiritual or physical can one fix the dominant quality.

Looking at Katherine Hepburn, Joan Crawford and Loretta Young, individually, it is extremely difficult to identify them with any particular time, place or pursuit, but the moment we study those young ladies alongside stars in the earthy, esthetic, cosmopolitan, plain or man-and-woman-on-the-street groups, stamp and date them for time and place indicated in those groupings, their classification becomes obvious.

Another very satisfying way of fixing the flexibility of stars is to visualize them in a successful movie or in a time, place and pursuit familiar to us. Take *Holiday* for a test piece:

There was nothing in Anne Harding's role, rebel sister, that called for an Anne Harding type or talents peculiar to Anne Harding alone. Jean Arthur, Miriam Hopkins, Helen Hayes or Sylvia Sydney could make the role quite as real and appealing.

On the other hand none of the stars who might play the Harding role to good effect could carry on convincingly in the Mary Astor role. Perhaps types like Joan Bennett, Gail Patrick, Norma Shearer, because their personality and delivery places them definitely as social climbers.

Now then, turn to the remote classifications and visualize Greta Garbo, Katherine Hepburn, Anita Louise or Olivia DeHaviland in the Harding role and we discover something a bit too femme fatale about Garbo, too daguerrotype or one of the Muses about Hepburn, with Louise and DeHaviland runners-up, both having decision and pugnacity enough to successfully oppose a simon-pure Wall Street tycoon father, yet DeHaviland and Louise are not of the timber that could convincingly turn down a social career, the pursuit that held so little interest for Harding.

For Garbo or Hepburn to be effective in the Harding role, major alterations in the treatment of the stage play would be necessary, alterations that might result in most anything but the *Holiday* that first reached the screen. Incidentally, those alterations were made in the later version; whether done to accommodate



Hepburn as a type we would not know.

Thus we discover in bringing groups into close contrast and in casting them in a specific period, locale and pursuit we have a dependable basis for judging star flexibility. Of course, such comparisons are probably odious to star fans but direct comparisons usually indicate unerringly mistakes in casting, revealing quickly whether or not the orchid can endear us to the moods and ideas furthered by iris or sunflower.

Now that we have cast a play delivered with a high degree of restraint on both sides, let us turn to a play and a principal role that was delivered with a minimum of restraint; specifically the late Jean Harlow's role in *The Redheaded Woman*.

The redhead's role called for brazen, go-getting sex as a lever to social recognition, which makes it doubtful if anyone but Miss Harlow could have delivered; yet there are two stars, Rosalind Russell and Gail Patrick, who might do things with that role if they could be prevailed upon to forget themselves for an hour or so and go completely hussy.

Russell and Patrick both possess the innate quality that pulverizes male resistance, but whether they could give the redhead the thermal and dynamic qualities Miss Harlow did is a question. Which leaves the Mademoiselles Russell and Patrick where we found them, in a highly restricted casting area.

Runners-up for the Harlow role are Alice Faye, Joan Blondell and Dorothy Lamour, second choices because of the inflexibility of the redhead role itself, a factor that must always be kept in mind when judging suitability of types for given roles.

After we have satisfied ourselves as to kind of locale, period and pursuit a star can carry to role's and star's mutual advantage the next step is to determine star vitality, the degree to which he is sensitive or non-sensitive, cryptic or credulous, emotional or non-emotional, charitable or non-charitable. Here again the direct comparison is necessary if our conclusions are to mean anything.

However, before we proceed with any investigation of those qualities, let us clarify what we mean by charitable, sensitive, mystical, emotional, and vital.

First, non-charitable star types should not be con-

fused with the hard, cruel, pitiless, embittered, grasping and cynical any more than charitable types should be confused with open-handed, generous, righteous and virtuous types. Those extremes, we repeat, are not found in the star roster and any suggestion of those qualities as fixed characteristics automatically place the star in the featured or supporting lists.

Charitable star types are usually distinguished by generosity of features, but in proportion; understanding, tolerant, patient, kindly, but never in the best sense of the word credulous or implicitly trusting.

The non-charitable star types are usually distinguished by lips, chin and nose finely and firmly chiseled, with eyes analytical, perceiving, appraisive, chin more or less aggressive and unyielding.

Vitality is the essential life force. Vitality in a star means health, tip-top physical condition, virility, potency, pulchritude, which every star must have to hold his public.

Sensitive faces are alive, like a mirror or silver nitrate on a movie film, reacting quickly to shades of light. The more and finer the shades of emotion and feeling an actor can register the more sensitive he is as a type.

There are no insensible types among the stars, blunted in feeling or perception, but there are non-sensitive types whose feelings and emotions are under perpetual restraint; any show of emotion or feeling either implied or expressed, or inherent in their roles.

Non-sensitive types are the inscrutable, mystical or suspense types, usually non-charitable—not uncharitable—and non-emotional in action, while sensitive types are usually but not always charitable and emotional.

As for emotional types, that is really a misnomer. Emotion is a reaction, not a condition. Charity, inscrutability, sensitivity, time, place and vitality in star personalities are definitely conditions, or fixed qualities.

In earlier chapters we established that inherent reach or extent of appeal and non-appeal in main pursuits or roles was basic to any sympathy those pursuits might provoke or induce, that when enhanced and enlarged by kindred or complementary pursuits, sym-

pathy was proportionately increased or kept alive.

In like manner we have just discovered elements of appeal and non-appeal in stars equally as basic, elements the reader should scan for in star personalities as closely as he did appeal inherent in main pursuits. Along with that scanning he should determine flexibility and suitability of a star as a thing entirely separate from his role or pursuit if he would be sure that the star is enhancing the role, adding to its singularity, or singularity of locale.

As for this business of harnessing our yens and aversions regarding stars we need only be mindful of the fact that any actor who qualifies star rating or billing over the title of a movie draws several millions of people to the theatre on personal appeal alone, whether we like him or not. If he can't he doesn't star for long.

Although we may not be able to "see" him, there are so many who can that it makes little difference whether we do or not. Therefore, it is to our advantage not only to understand why but to accept star appeal as well-founded. For example:

Whether Diamond Lil, in *She Done Him Wrong*, wanted her men with or without benefit of clergy did not matter. The audience did not dislike that type of woman. Nor is it for that type. It neither approves nor disapproves of types unless they are repulsive or offensive to the eye. At first sight audience reaction to types is entirely a thing of curiosity or speculation.

Therefore, when Diamond Lil stepped onto the screen, Mae West was no more and no less "on trial" than any other actress, but she was on trial; and the audience was willing and eager to render a favorable verdict if she merited it. She did.

When Mae West put her signature to the final draft of *She Done Him Wrong*, she okayed a great script. In preparing that stage play for the screen she was profoundly impressed with the necessity of compelling sympathy for a potentially non-sympathetic role. But for one reason or another that impression did not last.

In a picture Mae West produced subsequently she went on the make for a guileless small town auto-mechanic (if Randolph Scott can look or act guileless)

loved genuinely by an innocent country gal. She could have alienated less sympathy if she had robbed an orphanage. Yet she was the same Mae West who appeared in *She Done Him Wrong*. Which answers the question whether or not the public likes movie stars. They do if their role warrants. In short, the idea that a star can compel liking simply because of some magic aura surrounding their person is fallacious in the extreme.

Whatever a star happens to be on the screen is first of all in his role, or in his personality if his personality enhances his role, but in the end he is his role, or whatever author, adaptationist, director and cameraman make him. Those yeomen, along with the actor are in turn merely mediums that singularize and further pursuits, adding something of appeal, mystery or authenticity. Always the pursuit or role makes or unmakes the star.

Now that we have a fairish idea of what role can do for star, let's see what this thing called miscasting of star roles can do to really great movies.

Regarding Chester Morris in *The Redheaded Woman*, cast as the son of the owner, and managing the store where the redhead clerked, Morris was woefully miscast; much too rugged, out-of-doors or action type; but acceptable as the redhead's victim because her role was dominant, his secondary. Despite miscasting *The Redheaded Woman* was a memorable hit.

The number one pickpocket in the silent version of *The Miracle Man* was miscast with a very charitable looking, non-pocket-picking type of star, the late Thomas Meighan. Nevertheless, that version was a tremendous hit. Meighan's role in the talkie version was properly cast with a non-charitable type, Chester Morris. The sound version was a disappointment. And not because of casting or because it was a remake with the edge taken off. Romance eased its grip. Chester Morris was miscast as the husband in *The Divorcee*. Yet that was a hit; which speaks highly of Morris as a trouper.

Chico's role in the silent version of *Seventh Heaven* was cast with a very superior sort of non-sewer-washing type of actor, Charles Farrell. That version too was a hit. The talkie version, properly cast with a

charitable type, James Stewart, was also class A entertainment.

In the original screen version of *Holiday* the hero's role was cast with the late Robert Ames, a type that furthered the abstraction, "the desire to live," most convincingly. The recent version with Cary Grant, a type as prone to philosophizing over what it's all about, and why, as Clark Gable. Yet that miscasting did not affect *Holiday's* box-office, or word-of-mouth. Reports are that it is once again a contender for annual awards.

The point is, if star and role do not clash too radically a great movie has little to fear from star and role contradictions.

Of course, adaptation is supposed to take care of star and role contradictions, particularly when required types are not available, but reverence for original versions often makes adaptation highly inflexible, and when an inflexible adaptation and an unsuited inflexible star type meet, believability goes begging.

Taking star and role contradictions seriously may seem inordinate when we consider that a role to a great extent types the star, charitable roles giving non-charitable types a sympathetic quality, mysterious roles giving transparent types an inscrutable quality, but quite often the contradiction speaks so loudly no matter what the star says and does, no matter how earnest and emphatic his delivery, he cannot ring true.

Availability of types has of course always been a problem because studios have never had an extremely wide range of star types under contract, being long on certain types and short on others. But free-lancing and the star loan-out practice now in wide operation in Hollywood, plus the flexibility of most stars, plus the flexibility of most roles, and roles should be flexible if the story has any appeal to speak of, makes casting one of Hollywood's lesser problems.

Of course, when casting of star roles as well as second lead and featured roles, is taken seriously; when all casting is as sensitive and critical as it was in *Holiday* and *Street Scene* the result lifts the play just that much nearer great movie rating.

In winding up this chapter, let us make some observations regarding actors who try to bring remote

historical and fictional characters to life.

When James Cagney simulates Bottom the Weaver in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, when Charles Laughton tries to revive Rembrandt and Paul Muni orientalizes himself into a semblance of Wang Lung, it doesn't work out. Bottom isn't Bottom. He is James Cagney. Rembrandt is Charles Laughton and Wang Lung or Zola is Paul Muni.

No matter how painstaking with make-up or make-believe, how sincere, flexible or sensitive their delivery, always, through the mask comes the undeniable voice and mannerisms of Mr. Muni, Mr. Cagney or Mr. Laughton; the star himself the one insurmountable obstacle to any 24-karat genuineness in his impersonations. But then only quibblers are scornful of James (Bottom the Weaver) Cagney, Charles (Rembrandt) Laughton and Paul (Wang Lung) Muni. All are capital entertainers.

## CHAPTER 7

### Comedy

**NOTE:** The author has invited Mr. Charles Francis (Chuck) Riesner to guest-write this chapter on comedy.

Mr. Riesner has had a long and varied career in writing and directing comedy, with the emphasis on writing. He was the first "gag-man" in pictures, back in the old Keystone days and co-author and associate director with Charles Chaplin in the production of *A DOG'S LIFE*, *SHOULDER ARMS*, *A DAY'S PLEASURE*, *THE KID*, *THE PILGRIM* and *THE GOLD RUSH*.

Of special mention in more than a hundred successful stars and pictures Mr. Riesner directed there was Charlie Chaplin's brother, Sidney, in *THE MAN ON THE BOX*, *OH WHAT A NURSE*, *THE MISSING LINK*, *THE FORTUNE HUNTER* and *THE BETTER 'OLE*, all made for Warner Brothers.

The *BETTER 'OLE* ran on Broadway for six months at two dollars top and equally as long at Grauman's Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood, considered the longest run any comedy has ever enjoyed with the possible exception of Charlie Chaplin's *GOLD RUSH*.

Mr. Riesner also co-authored and directed Buster Keaton in *STEAMBOAT BILL, JR.*, and directed Dane and Arthur in *BROTHERLY LOVE* and *CHINA BOUND* for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

The late Marie Dressler claimed Mr. Riesner her favorite director when he directed her with Polly Moran in *THE HOLLYWOOD REVIEW* of 1929, the first Review in sound, also for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. He then directed Miss Dressler in *CHASING RAINBOWS*, *CAUGHT SHORT*, *REDUCING* and *POLITICS* for the same company. In fact Mr. Riesner has directed nearly every comedian and comedienne of any note in pictures.

Just to mention a few there was Charlotte Greenwood and Reginald Denny in *STEPPING OUT*. Robert Montgomery in *LOVE IN THE ROUGH*, Bert Lahr and Charlotte Greenwood in *FLYING HIGH*, and Spencer Tracy in *THE SHOW-OFF*. Leo Carillo and Louise Fazenda in *THE WINNING TICKET* and Jack Benny, Ted Healy and Una Merkle in *IT'S IN THE AIR*.

And to top off that imposing list of achievements he wrote that stirring war-time song, GOODBYE BROADWAY, HELLO FRANCE, and last year he authored LITTLE INCH-HIGH PEOPLE, the book for children that educators and child psychologists have stamped as the outstanding child's book in a decade. The author presents, Mr. Riesner:

## Getting People to Laugh is a Serious Business

by Charles F. Riesner

When my son Dink was two years old we got him a small and very lively fox terrier. And from then on every time he saw a horse he would become hysterical with laughter.

Picture the three of us, mother, father and baby driving down a country road, all laughing until the tears rolled down our cheeks, the baby laughing at a horse and mother and father in turn laughing at the baby.

Why were we laughing at the baby and why was the baby laughing at a horse? The horse wasn't laughing, nor was he doing anything funny. He was just an ordinary horse, normally proportioned, grazing in a field.

What the baby saw was not a horse. To him that animal was a giant dog, but a lazy dog that moved slowly, not quickly and playfully like his little dog.

Later when Dink had grown and discovered for himself that the animal grazing in the pasture was not a big dog he no longer laughed at it. And that experience emphasized to me with increasing force three things most important to making people laugh. First, Superiority, second, Contrast, third, that there is no such a thing as Comedy as a thing in itself.

We knew that the baby had made a mistake, that he was laughing at something that was not funny in itself. In other words we were in on something he didn't know about and that knowledge made us feel superior to him. Any feeling of superiority is pleasant. Pleasure can express itself only in a joyful sound, or laughter, if there is enough reason for it. His hysterical laughter made his mistake that much bigger; the more he laughed the bigger his mistake became and the more reason we had to laugh.



A father gave his little child, too young to go to school, a simple problem in arithmetic.

"Darling, how much is five and five?" And Darling answered, "A million, billion thrillion!"

Because the father knew the correct answer he felt pleasantly superior. If the child had answered 4, or 6 or 7 or a number close to the correct answer, he would have felt little amusement, but the ridiculously large figure made him feel that much more superior and happier. That is the only way we can account for his laughter because a million billion thrillion is not immensely funny in itself. I say not immensely funny in itself because in the word thrillion there is a slight variation of the strictly unfunny word trillion, a slight cause for laughter.

True that most of us regard comedy as a thing in itself, or as a thing unlike any other thing, much as a person, an automobile or an animal are unlike each other, but with rare exceptions, and they are qualified, there is nothing known inherently funny or comical.

The duck, the jackass, the kangaroo and the seal, standard laugh-getters of vaudeville and the comic strip, are not funny in themselves. They may be cute, pathetic, incongruous, in direct contrast with animals of so-called normal proportions but not inherently funny.

Least comical of all things supposed to be comical in themselves are comedians. Looking at Charles Chaplin, Bob Burns, Joan Davis or the Ritz Brothers in repose we may smile but not because of their inherently funny personalities. We smile because they are proven, reputable funsters, and we are anticipating a comical exaggeration, turn or twist.

In fact, when a comedian becomes conscious of everybody present hanging onto his every word and expecting him to say or do something comical he is not only inspired to give everything that happens around him a humorous twist, but he feels that he must be comical to live up to his reputation for being comical.

Getting back to the subject of nothing being funny in itself, when I was working with Charlie Chaplin we would go for long walks to talk over the development of a story and whenever child or adult recognized him they would break into a broad smile and the children

would shout, "There's Charlie Chaplin!" Then they would laugh as much as they did when he appeared on the screen with moustache, big shoes, stick and derby. Yet he had none of those things with him or on him nor had he said or done anything that called for laughter.

In line with how unfunny things are in themselves, there was a fellow I had seen several times at the Brown Derby and at the Legion fights. He looked like a Doctor or I judged probably a Lawyer. Imagine my surprise when a friend introduced him as Milton Berle, the comedian.

If then nothing is inherently comical where does amusement and laughter begin? What makes people laugh? What about food?

Take the fish-and-chips folks in Maine, the corn-bread-and-pot-likker folks in Tennessee, the paprikas, sauer kraut, spaghetti and gefultefish folks all over the United States. All regard each other's taste in foods with a certain degree of amusement. Yet one and all have a serious and wholesome love of food, and regardless of kind, the manner of its eating is very definitely a sobering ritual everywhere.

Eating peas with a spoon is common practice and not in the least amusing. Eating peas with a knife causes laughter whether we happen to be German, Italian, Jewish, Irish, Hungarian, Southern folks or Northern folks because peas on a knife is a departure from the customary, the most efficient way of eating peas. Therefore, in any stupid or novel, smart or innocent departure from the conventional, normal, or practical manner or method of enjoying the primal necessities, food, drink, clothing, shelter, money and romance, we discover the substance of a surefire comedy technique. That is, the departure is surefire on one condition. It must be harmless or innocuous. For example:

Man meets woman. Man makes advances. Woman shows advances are not welcome. Man forces attentions on woman. Frightened, woman flees. Man pursues woman. Fear of man, sympathy for woman are the reactions.

Little woman meets big man. Little woman makes a pass at big man. Big man shows pass is not wel-

come. Little woman forces her attentions on big man. Frightened, big man takes to his heels. Little woman pursues big man, laughter the reaction because normal behavior has been inverted. But if the foregoing theory is true then why do people laugh when Harpo Marx chases the girls?

The answer is, if that drooling, wall-eyed jack-in-the-box, not even remotely resembling Harpo out of make-up, isn't the farthest thing removed from a normal masculine menace, then Clark Gable and Cary Grant are just a couple of wistful orchids. The point is, Harpo Marx chasing the girls and big man terrified by little woman is a departure from the normal appearance and behavior of man but definitely toward the harmless and impotent.

With no actual threat or menace of any consequence in Harpo chasing girls, only one reaction is possible and that is laughter. In fact, the only time an audience will laugh at all when danger is present is with the triumph of virtue over wickedness. Laughter then is a thing of elation and exultation, the reaction that spelled success for comedians who specialized in belittling and deflating the handsome and pompous straight man in vaudeville.

Upstaging an exaggerated ego, offensively condescending, the straight man put both audience and comedian beneath him. Tumbled off his perch by the barbed wit of the comedian, laughter relieved, because laughter was the only audible reaction possible when the ego balance between audience and straight man was restored. The same reaction was gotten when the blunders, mistakes and pretensions of the comedian were exposed, that is, if he was boastful or assuming. However, in the latter circumstance the straight man was the personable, likable element, the comedian the villain, but a likable villain because we pitied him as we laughed at him and pity is akin to liking.

In *Politics*, one of the pictures I directed for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, an unscrupulous Mayor, campaigning for re-election is addressing a thousand or more women in the town hall. Marie Dressler has entered and sits at the back of the hall. She has just returned from the funeral of a young girl who was killed in a brawl in a speak-easy.

Having gone to school with Marie and figuring that it would be a smart political move to have Marie talk to the women, the Mayor invites her to come up onto the platform and make a speech. But instead of making a speech Marie asks the Mayor some very pertinent questions about crime in that little town everybody loves so much.

The Mayor tries glibly to get her off that subject but Marie is too aroused to think of anything else, too heartbroken over the murder of the little girl she has known since a baby.

Unable to put her questions off, the oily-tongued Mayor gives her evasive answers, but Marie insists on direct answers. Why does he tolerate rum-runners, bootleggers and gangsters? Why does he allow them to endanger peoples' lives? Where is the protection he had promised them and their children?

The Mayor finally becomes so exasperated he forgets himself and tells Marie to keep her nose out of his business, probably the worst thing he could say.

Stung by his brazen attitude Marie goes after him hammer and tongs, the women in the audience cheering her on. Then as the women become more and more incensed at him he begins to wilt and look for a way to get out of there and suddenly we see the high and mighty Mayor tumbled from his perch as he hurries for the back door, with books, umbrellas, even a few purses hurled at him.

That scene was definitely dramatic and yet it got as much laughter and applause as any so-called comedy scene I have ever directed. But the point is that the double-dealing Mayor made the audience feel that they were beneath him and when Marie toppled him from his high pedestal, virtue triumphed over wickedness, inferiority over superiority, a surefire reason for elation.

Thus we learn that comedy is not a thing in itself but an effect produced by two things. The first may be anything within the realm of human knowledge or consciousness, but to be effective must be definitely unfunny, that is, neither existing nor occurring directly or indirectly with anything that might make it look or sound ridiculous or amusing. The second factor, which may be a stupid or smart variation or inversion

of the first, must be definitely harmless or innocuous.

In fact, bodily harm or injury to any one on the screen, whether or not the audience is in sympathy with them, may choke back or discourage any inclination to laugh. And that holds even in the case of the corrupt Mayor. If he had been injured in his flight, the laugh would have died, because an audience will not laugh when they see any one suffering physical pain, no matter how much the audience dislikes him. For example:

An old lady in court:

"You say your husband struck you?"

"He did, your honor," plaintively. "Once he beat me for nearly three hours and honestly I never got so tired of a man in all my life. He's been gone some thirty years now and I think I ought to have a separation."

Obviously painful and therefore harmful, the beating the old lady suffered denies the theory that comedy reaction must be harmless to produce laughter. However, the woman showed no evidence of ill treatment and the laughter was an expression of relief, as well as amusement.

To insure a laugh when it is necessary for characters to fall or be knocked down, I always have them move or roll a bit, then come to a stop, either against a settee or wall, then sit up and look dazed or perplexed or angry when they recover from the shock. And that reaction always gets a laugh.

One day we were shooting on a Weber and Fields picture and the little fellow knocked the big fellow, Lew Fields, flat. Lew lay there as though he were unconscious and I knew right then that such business would not do at all but I didn't like telling those old timers.

When we previewed the picture that scene not only was greeted with silence but all efforts to get laughs suffered for a long time after that scene, and just because of a still fall. If Lew had sat up and had looked stupidly about him or over at the little fellow I know the laughter then and from there on would have been hearty.

With two factors involved in the comedy effort, quite naturally a contrast is secured. In fact it is hardly possible for any one thing to exist or occur as

a variation or an inversion of another without presenting some sort of contrast. In other words, securing a contrast presents few difficulties. The real problem is that of securing a kind and degree of contrast that will produce the most laughter. To get an idea of what is meant by kind and degree in this respect let us consider a few comedy gags in illustration:

Bathos, or the ridiculous descent from the lofty to the commonplace, surefire for laughs when exposing affectation or pretense:

"To enjoy the country," a ham poet declaimed loudly "one must have a soul."

"Or an automobile," rejoined his practical-minded listener.

"Her ideal was shattered," one woman emoted with heaving bosom.

"So I hear," her listener calmly observed. "When did he go broke?"

In those two examples of bathos we have an exposition of character, the kind that idealizes, sublimates, rhapsodizes, and the kind with its feet on the ground, realistic and outspoken. The degree of contrast is of course in the extreme. Incidentally, the foregoing expositions were **direct**, with the truth perceived for the audience **by the foil**. The following situational gags or **indirect** expositions are characters unaware that personality, diction, dress or background belie them, their affectations or pretenses discovered **by the audience**:

The pompous slattern highhatting the slavey, a poise genuinely regal contradicted by every phase of her sorry estate; the snob in tatters, the ragged individualist, Bert Lahr offering an analysis of the Prelude in 'G' Major; James Durante and his noble but futile efforts to be one with the "literatty."

Chaplin's tramp, man-waif, acting the man-about-town, his unkemptness forever refuting his high pretensions.

Mae West in the role of a carnival shimmy dancer listening to a proposal of marriage. "You mean," she queried wistfully, "that you want me to give up my art?"

The late Marie Dressler elected Mayor and beaming with honest pride as she announced the appointment

of her dear friend, Polly Moran, to the esteemed post of Commissioner of Garbage.

Joe Laurie, Jr., sublimating backwardness: "I spent four of my best years in the sixth grade."

Farcing, much ado about little, stressing or emphasizing things out of all proportion to their true importance or significance provides a surefire comedy contrast when the result is an exposition of plain pinheadedness:

Dismantling a balky automobile and holding a lengthy and profound diagnosis over the remains only to discover there is no gas in the tank.

Joe Cook with his system of gears, pulleys, levers and triggers finally releasing a great weight on his assistant's conk, a cue to tap the drum.

And the contrast is just as surefire with the formula for pathos; little ado about much or understatement:

"Well dearie," said Ted Cook's Aunt Bella, "It was like this: He said the coffee was weak. I threw my cup in his face. He took me over his knee and spanked me with his slipper. I conked him with a bridge lamp and the next thing we knew we found ourselves quarreling."

Audiences, although their attention is fixed on the screen, are at the same time conscious of the fact that they are seated in a public place, a condition perfect for embarrassment.

Now then, the comedian suddenly blurts out that he knows a place right there in that neighborhood where women don't wear anything but bracelets.

Apprehensive, ill-at-ease, the straight man finally manages to stutter: "Wh-wh-where?"

"On their wrists!" the comic tells him.

Knowing the audience was primed for embarrassment, the comedian tensed them still more for shock. Fooling them, he next lulls them into an even greater feeling of security with a statement as innocent as the cooing of a dove.

"I just saw a guy milking a cow."

"Where?" the straight man asks.

"About that far from the middle," and the comedian shows the straight man just how far from the middle.

In that particular manner of routining gags we discover the comedy dialogist's ace-in-the-hole, or self

preservation, particularly audience preservation of its dignity.

The foregoing examples are in no sense an attempt to encompass the whole technique of variation and inversion for comedy results. In fact it would take a volume or two to appreciate the extent to which that technique has developed. The chief factor in that technique is of course contrast because contrast is the basis for conflict or contrast in action to the same extent that character and role are the basis for characterization, or character in action.

Positive contrasts are to be found in practically any direction we would care to look. There was Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., when he first came to the screen. Seeing and hearing the name Douglas Fairbanks we expected the matinee idol of that period, the romantic type, and he was that type in appearance. But in action he was an acrobat, and everything he did was the opposite of what his personality led us to expect.

Harold Lloyd is the scholarly appearing young man, one we always associate with browsing among books in a library, yet he is always pictured in action, his chores and adventures physical instead of mental.

In the picture **Reducing**, in which Marie Dressler and Polly Moran were sisters, we had several kinds and degrees of contrast. First, Polly lived in New York City and Marie lived in South Bend, small and big town or a contrast in locales. Polly was wealthy, Marie poor, a social and economic contrast. Marie was a big woman, Polly a little woman, a physical contrast. Marie had an inferiority complex while Polly's was superior, an emotional contrast. Marie and her family got on a train in South Bend, the first time they had ever been on a train, an experience contrast; that new experience to them was an old experience to the people at the station and to the audience. And those basic contrasts provided the substance for a continuous run of contrasts or conflicts through to the end of the picture.

"Chuck," the name the boys tagged me with in school and the name I carried into vaudeville before my Keystone days provides a contrast the exact opposite of Douglas Fairbanks in action.

With apologies to the many gentlemen by the



name of Charles who are "Chuck" to their friends on the social register, the name Chuck suggests the "dese, dem and dose kind o' guys," or have I lived in the big cities too much.

Anyway, the fact that my personality is well over on the "heavy" side, or not the type to whom ladies write perfumed notes, made it necessary in vaudeville for me to wear clothes tailored to the minute, and to acquire a delivery that was modest and retiring almost to the point of being naive, that is, for laugh purposes. The Chuck personality accentuated the shy and genteel delivery and that delivery accentuated the Chuck, and the contrast was so surprising that people who had seen me work would invariably say, "I didn't think I was going to like you when you first came on stage. But before I knew it I was enjoying your act very much and it puzzled me." And I never took the trouble to explain why they were puzzled. I enjoyed their puzzlement.

We were up on the Sacramento river shooting scenes for **Steamboat Bill, Jr.**, with Buster Keaton starred. The story was about a Captain of an old river steamboat expecting the arrival of his son from college whom he hadn't seen since a baby when he had left the child and its mother flat.

The late Ernest Torrence played the Captain and father role and at that time Ernest was one of the outstanding character heavies on the screen. His belligerent, gruff manner and his reputation as a heavy was the best foil Keaton ever had in his long and brilliant career.

Keaton, playing the Captain's long lost son, had just completed his first year at college and when he stepped off the train in that old river town to see his father for the first time he had done everything possible to look like the Freshman of those days.

When the old Captain arrived at the depot he approached several big husky fellows thinking one of them might be his son. He had planned to make a deck-hand of his boy and he was looking for the deck-hand type. And when he got a look at Buster wearing a beret and holding onto a ukelele he could hardly believe his eyes. All he could do was shake his head in disgust and despair.

Suddenly realizing that he would be a target for ridicule when his mate and his crew got a look at his boy in that Freshman regalia he hurried to the nearest store and told the clerk to outfit his boy in working clothes and he would be back later to pay for them.

Aware that his father owned a boat and that he was the son of a Captain and wanting his dad to be proud of him Buster selected an outfit befitting a Captain's son, as swanky as anything that ever graced the bridge of the Queen Mary. And right there my troubles began.

When we started the camera and Buster stepped out of that store carrying a swagger stick and dressed in a nifty, perfectly tailored naval uniform and cap, the ensemble not in the least eccentric or exaggerated, serious objections were raised because Buster did not look comical enough.

The producer was quite sure that Buster's neatly fitting uniform would ruin any chance of getting laughs. And I had to admit to myself that putting Keaton into a neatly fitting uniform for laugh purposes did not at first glance appear logical. However, there was more to be considered than a neat uniform alone.

Prior to outfitting Keaton in that uniform we had built an unsightly river dock, an old side-wheeler of Civil War vintage, an aging Captain, rough, gruff and tough, and his motley, unkempt, hard-boiled crew completing the picture. And that scene was built and cast that way in order to realize fully upon the contrast Buster would create when he arrived there.

But my analysis of the possibility of more and bigger laughs when Buster arrived at that unsightly boat and dock in a neat uniform got me nowhere. The only thing that saved the situation was the fact that we would have to take time off to have a comedy uniform made and that meant a half day or more lost and an added production cost of probably five thousand dollars or more.

So we went ahead and shot the scene with the neat uniform, hardly anyone convinced that it was the logical thing to do, and when the picture was completed and playing to packed theatres I won my argument.

If you were there, you will recall the howl that greeted Buster when he stepped out of the clothing

store. You laughed because you knew the old Captain expected to see him in dungarees and a work shirt. and you laughed at Buster because he was expecting to step onto a modern steamboat.

You laughed again at the way Ernest Torrence in the pilot house, suffered when he got his first glimpse of Buster swinging down the dock in that smart uniform. You laughed at the Captain's agony because he was getting the punishment he deserved for leaving his wife and baby helpless years before.

You laughed at the thunderstruck expression on Second Mate Tom Lewis' face when he joined Torrence in the pilot house, adding to Torrence's embarrassment and misery. You laughed again when Lewis handed Torrence a loaded six shooter and said, "Here . . . no jury would convict you!" And again when Buster passed the roughneck crew and bowed politely and they spat in disgust.

When Buster stepped off the gangplank onto the old steamboat and a small scow passing on the other side caused a slight wash that gently rocked the boat and Buster became terribly seasick the audience roared. And when he reached for an old weather beaten life-preserver hanging on a hook at the side of the boat and it slipped out of his hand into the river to sink like a rock there was more laughter.

In fact the audience did not stop laughing from the time Buster left the store in that neat looking uniform until long after he was on the old steamboat. If his uniform had been comical the Captain and crew would have laughed, not the audience.

The idea is, when two things are bidding for laughter at the same time, one is bound to weaken the effectiveness of the other, meaning that audiences could not possibly have enlarged as fully as they did upon the humor of Keaton's welcome with a comedy uniform claiming part of their attention.

Stepping out of that store in a comical uniform would not only have obtruded upon the conflict anticipated by the audience but the sympathy and suspense generated by hiking that anticipation would have been diluted.

Another way to analyze the laugh possibilities in a scene like that is to visualize two welcomes, one aboard

an old broken down river boat, the Captain and crew in character with it, the other a trim vessel, Captain and men neatly dressed, with this question:

If a burlesk uniform can provide an extreme in contrasts against smartly tailored uniforms, how can that type of uniform produce the same degree of contrast against unkemptness and dilapidation? And there can be only one answer to that. A comedy uniform is a form of unkemptness in itself and no positive contrast can be secured with things too similar in character.

In giving as much space as I have to comedy uniform versus neat uniform the reader may get the impression that I am overstressing something singularly elementary and obvious.

As a matter of fact intrinsic and relative effectiveness of comedy factors is important whether it concerns dress, ideas, emotions or main pursuits. In fact the weightier, the more solemn, even tragic elements that inspire a serious interest, that tighten and tense the diaphragm from which the heartier laughs issue, are meaningless for laugh purposes unless the lighter, inconsequential, eccentric or ridiculous factors offer a positive contrast. And degree of contrast is always indicated in the relative significance of both factors.

As for dialog and the part it plays in variation and inversion for laughs, just because dialog helps the camera to secure a larger variety of contrasts does not change basic requirements. In fact with dialog and sound effects achieving finer shades of meaning and feeling, increasing the range of contrasts and conflicts possible, an even more critical sense of the intrinsic and relative effectiveness of comedy factors is required.

In that respect take those two veteran troupers, Frank Morgan and Wallace Beery, two very versatile actors that I have had the great pleasure to direct. However, in this case let us consider a very good Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer picture they appeared in that I did not have the pleasure of directing: "The Port of Seven Seas." I select this picture because it illustrates so well a point I would like to make regarding range of contrasts.

First, Morgan and Beery present none of the positive physical contrast of the Weber and Fields and

Laurel and Hardy variety. Therefore the contrasts had to be in their roles. In "The Port of Seven Seas," they were friendly enemies, a contrast in temperaments.

Beery played a pub-keeper and Morgan a wealthy widower and master sail-maker, a vocational contrast. Next was a contrast in ages, Morgan the middle aged sail-maker wanting to marry a fish wife's lovely daughter, played by Maureen O'Sullivan, a girl the pub-keeper's son had been courting before he went away on a round-the-world sea voyage.

The pub-keeper questioned the sail-maker's motives in everything, even when he arrived late at their daily card game for the first time in ten years. Particularly and heatedly did he question the widower's interest in the fish-wife's daughter, charging him with every motive but the real one, an all-consuming passion for an heir, the child that his first marriage had denied him. But when the pub-keeper learned that the girl was with child by his son, and the old sail-maker was taking on his son's responsibility, their differences vanished in thin air.

Pacing the floor as they awaited the happy event the two old fogies exhibited all the symptoms of an expectant father, bringing the mother and father in man, youth and age into sharp contrast. In trying to calm each other, Morgan finally fainting dead away, the hilarious condition into which they got the audience threatened seriously to lighten the gravity of the main event; the Morgan and Beery delivery of a role is highly singular, in fact unique, so entertaining in themselves the humor of any mood or pursuit they happen to be furthering can easily fade the significance of any tragic undertone paralleling. But at no time from the moment the audience was conscious of a possible scandal did the Beery-Morgan comedy obtrude. And the tragi-comedy contrasts were ever positive and active.

Later during the crisis the natural mother and father faced when the lad returned to claim her and his child, the tragedy of that crisis was brushed in so poignantly in Beery's and Morgan's reaction to it that they brought tears with laughter.

But the salient point is, that the anxiety and excitement shown by the two over the arrival of the baby

was genuine, even though it reached a pitch of hysteria and the arrival of the baby was just as convincingly portrayed, both factors intrinsically believable, yet relatively the suffering endured by the two men in the presence of that fateful event on the other side of the door was empty of any real significance.

During the crisis we saw Morgan grappling with the problem of a natural father's rights and whether he should remove himself, leaving youth to youth. "I could step off the dock, and, accidentally drown myself. Committing suicide would be the handsome thing to do, wouldn't it?" And then with all the vehemence he was capable of he protested that he would not commit suicide, that no one could make him commit suicide, and the old pub-keeper calmly informed him that no one had asked him to commit suicide.

To which he protested even more vehemently that, "Yes, no one asked me to commit suicide but myself. I asked myself to commit suicide and I'm not going to commit suicide." A splendid portrayal of the conflict within, the tragi-comic contrast as positive as a Scotchman throwing away money.

Many years ago when the movies were silent quite often situations arose where comedian, writer and director were strongly divided in their opinion regarding different kinds of comedy.

In an effort to satisfy everybody concerned regarding the differences I once made a test of a legitimate looking beggar walking up to and knocking at the back door of an ordinary looking house. The door was opened by an ordinary looking housewife. The tramp tipped his hat and spoke to her. She answered him and he spoke again. Then tipping his hat he turned and slowly walked away.

I ran that bit of film for a dramatic title writer and asked him to give me three strong legitimate titles where the tramp and the lady spoke to each other. Then I asked a comedy writer to come in and write three titles that would get laughs. We then cut those titles into the film, first the dramatic titles and of course they caused us to choke up a bit, they were written that way, and the comedy titles brought a laugh.

Next I had the same actors put on comedy make-up. The tramp became a crummy, squirmy type of bur-

lesque tramp, the woman of the house had her teeth blocked out and her hair fixed Sis Hopkins style, with pigtails, and the tramp crawled under the gate instead of opening it the usual way and the action of both people was crazy or goofy and exaggerated throughout the scene.

After we filmed the scene in the burlesque make-ups we cut in the titles that had been written for the dramatic scene. Those titles did not fit at all, and neither did the comedy titles. Then we wrote a set of crazy or goofy titles and cut them in and they made the action seem even more forced and unfunny than the straight comedy titles.

The point is the tramp and Sis Hopkins make-ups and action were not funny because they were not burlesquing anything in particular. Naturally dramatic and comedy titles were not funny for the same reason, because they did not exaggerate anything in particular. The following Ed Wynn studio gag is a very good example of exaggerating something definite, in his case a burlesque on the one-track-mind:

At the pull-away Ed is discovered in a studio, busily painting a picture of a bridge. Three stooges enter. They want to learn how to paint a picture of their Aunt.

Ed tells them he paints pictures of bridges, nothing else; he does not paint portraits. They thank him and leave. He turns to his easel and begins to paint when in they come again, making the same request and Ed gives them the same answer. They leave and return very shortly with the same request: "We would like to be artists. We want to learn how to paint a picture of our AUNT!"

Ed's patience is exhausted. "Alright!" he says, fixing their attention. "I will teach you boys how to paint a picture of your Aunt, but she will look like a bridge!"

The three stooges became obsessive, a mild but very definite form of insanity, Ed Wynn is the goofiest looking comic in show business, the perfect fool, the authentic dope, his inability to paint anything but bridges putting him in the same ward with the stooges. All were victims of a fixation. And the only contrast possible against that accumulation of goofiness was an

ultimate in intelligence.

In other words, the only positive contrast possible was pure logic, and if a man can paint nothing but bridges what is the answer? Quite naturally anything he tries to paint will look like a bridge. In fact it was not only the only answer that would convince three half-wits but it was consistency itself; a psychologist, a Supreme Court Judge and a British Diplomat couldn't have done better. It was the sanest solution anyone could conceive of in the circumstances.

Jack Wilson the screamingly funny blackface comedian back in the days of Headliner Vaudeville made his reputation with exaggerated imitations of acts on ahead of him. The more dramatic the act he burlesqued, the greater the laughs. If he happened to be on a bill where all the other acts were comedy, singing and dancing he usually had to drop the burlesque bit and resort to his own material, but he was never the hit he was with a great dramatic act on ahead of him. If he tried to burlesque a comedy act he fell flat. When the booking office recognized this particular talent they began to arrange his booking so that he followed acts that he could burlesque. Dramatic acts were his meat.

### The Audience

The producers, writers and directors of comedy for the stage are more fortunate than their brothers producing comedy for the screen. They have an immediate audience reaction that tells them whether their comedy efforts are getting over or not, a direct inspiration to be funny.

There is no audience and no laughter allowed on the studio set. All must be quiet when the camera and mikes are at work. And if you would appreciate what that means, try telling a funny story to a group of people who are not allowed to laugh or make any noise, and when you have finished see if you have any desire to tell another story. That experience will give you an idea of the conditions under which the screen producer, director, writer and comedian have to work to get laughs.

Even the dramatic units producing for the screen



have it much easier than the comedy units. The dramatic producer can wait for the world's reaction to his picture which may not always have to be highly favorable, but the comedy producer must get definite results at the preview, immediately the picture is finished, and the laughs must be there, or else.

Will they like it and how many will like it are the questions the dramatic director usually asks himself. Will they laugh at it? How much will they laugh, how deeply, how often and how long will that preview audience laugh, are the questions that annoy the comedy producer, the writer, director and comedian every waking hour.

And those questions are never quite satisfactorily answered in our minds even though years in the theatre and in the studio have given us a pretty sure grasp of what is fundamental to getting laughs.

One of the reasons we cannot be absolutely certain about laughs at a preview is that the preview audience may not always react to our comedy efforts in the manner of the nationwide audience at whom we have aimed our efforts.

Because the preview audience is a doubtful quantity and too often the final judge, because preview reaction is the only thing the producer has with which to judge how thousands of other audiences are going to react audience reaction becomes the chief concern of everybody working on a comedy.

### **Sympathy, Suspense and Believability**

Charles Chaplin in *The Gold Rush*, cold and hungry, asked a shopkeeper if he wanted the snow shoveled away from in front of his place of business. The door was slammed in his face. Turning to the merchant next door with the same query he got the job.

Up to that point the audience witnessed two genuinely tense and dramatic incidents, sincerely and spontaneously portrayed, offering nothing to laugh at. Not even the Chaplin shoes, the cane, nor the derby, were funny.

The snow began to fly under Chaplin's energetic shovelling, then a double dissolve, and the audience saw snow piled so high in front of the first store the

proprietor couldn't get out, nor customers in.

Chaplin was in love with a dance hall lassie, her girl friends laughing at the pathetic looking fellow behind his back. He invited them to a New Year's Eve party in his dilapidated shack. Tongue in cheek they promptly accepted the invitation and as promptly forgot about it. But Charlie was elated, and made elaborate preparations to entertain them. There were candies, goodies and a little gift for each girl, but at a terrific sacrifice.

Chaplin waited, fussing and puttering to have things just so for his guests. The hours passed. The candles burned low, guttering and sputtering as he sat before the dying embers of his fire, shivering with the cold. Then he fell asleep and dreamed of gayety, laughter and happiness there. Later, and just for a lark, the girls trooped in.

Chaplin was instantly on his feet, the gracious, the perfect host. Occupied feverishly with seeing to their comfort he was completely unaware of the ridicule, the sly derision, mocking asides. In his eagerness to please he spilled kerosene on his shoe. A moment later he was seated between two girls who had been particularly contemptful.

Lighting a cigarette he jauntily flipped the match away. Still burning, and unnoticed, it dropped onto his oil-soaked shoe, igniting it. Then he unconsciously crossed one leg over the other, the flaming shoe, visible to no one but the audience, coming to rest directly beneath the chair of one of the scoffing females. And there the tramp sat in happy, animated conversation while the girl who had had so much fun at his expense perspired and squirmed.

Now if hint of trick or plot, or anything but dire necessity had crept into the snow shovelling and New Year's party build-up, audience reaction to the heartless storekeeper's and the girls' dilemma would have been tepid. If Chaplin had even hinted at prank or retaliation the results would have been anything but funny. Sincerity, simplicity, spontaneity and "pressure of necessity" is the secret of much of Chaplin's success.

In the days of ah-me-proud-beauty when thespians were under-paid for over-acting, sincerity and spon-

taneity were just two practice words for clumsy tongues. Good acting was counted in the number of stops pulled, the amount of acid in the spurning and how much the scenery had been gnawed. That kind of acting has passed. In the main the declaiming, posturing and strutting actor has become the thinking actor. And that applies as well to comedy.

In fact the majority of our comedians today live their roles with more spontaneity and sincerity than many of our dramatic actors, mainly because they have learned that only in the honesty of their emoting can they secure the heartier laughs. They have learned that playing a role as though it had just occurred to them, as if it were a new experience, is just as necessary to successful comedy as it is to drama.

### **The Drama of Comedy**

A young girl comes out of a charity hospital with a two week old infant in her arms. She is an actress, her baby born out of wedlock. Penniless and friendless the young mother is forced to make a heartrending decision. She must find a home for her baby.

She goes to a fashionable neighborhood and seeing a big limousine parked before a mansion she places the tiny infant on the cushions of the rear seat. With tears coursing down her tired, haggard face, she hurries away.

She comes to a bridge, and it is quite obvious that she has decided to end her suffering but just as she moves to walk off the bridge into the river a nursemaid comes along pushing a baby carriage with a three year old baby in it. As the carriage passes a baby hand reaches out and takes hold of the girl's dress.

The maid speaks harshly to the baby and realizing that her baby may have a nurse like that the girl comes to her senses and hurries back to the automobile where she left her own baby. But the car is gone.

Frantic, she rushes up to the house and rings the bell, beads of perspiration standing out on her forehead as she waits for the door to open. When it does she is so distraught she fairly screams when she asks where the automobile has gone. And the people coming to the door suddenly discover that they would also like to know where the car has vanished to.

The chauffeur comes in on the run and shouts that the car has been stolen, and the young mother faints, sinking to the steps.

Later we see her back in the theatre. Grief and heartache have left their mark. She appears in a new play. The critics rave about her performance, acclaiming her the greatest emotional actress in years. But success brings her no happiness.

Five years roll by. She gives most of her time to charity, which takes her into the tenement districts. but she finds no trace of her child. Then one day when she has finally given up all hope she finds it with a beggar.

That is the story in brief of the first great comedy ever to come to the screen. It was called THE KID, starring Charlie Chaplin and discovering Jackie Coogan. The laughs of course came out of Charlie's story but without that girl's pathetic search for her baby there would have been **no story** for Charlie, and consequently no laughs. Charlie's tragi-comedy story came out of the drama of the girl's story, both stories linked by the little child.

Even the most casual examination will reveal in great comedies a treatment and direction comparable to that in the screen's best dramatic efforts.

And strange as it may seem to many critics, it is in the drama of a great comedy, as well as its comedy, that we find the secret of its success. the qualities that make uncontrollable laughter possible. And time does not change things fundamental to getting laughs, as the following story, a late comedy hit, points out so clearly:

A little girl thirteen years old arrives in a small town to visit her grandmother for the Christmas holidays, a vacation she has looked forward to with great expectations. Grandma has been writing to her about a boy who lives next door, how nice he has been, how he runs errands for her, how polite he is and how popular.

In the little girl's imagination that boy has become the hero who will sweep her off her feet and into the big romance of her life. Then when she meets him she learns that he is in love with another girl and all the

joy goes out of her vacation because life at thirteen without romance is like a song without a melody. But she is not one to take defeat without a struggle.

She learns from his sister that he is going to catch the devil for not washing his dad's car, so she sees to it that the car is washed. And he is grateful, and his gratitude brings hope. Then she learns that his big passion is a car of his own, particularly a second-handed roadster upon which he has made a down payment of twelve dollars. And she offers to loan him the balance, eight dollars, but he feels that it would be wrong for a man "of his position" to accept help from a woman. So she buys him a chromium winged ornament for the radiator, only to hear him exclaim excitedly how crazy not only his girl, but still another girl will be about it.

Paralleling that little girl's unhappy efforts to win the boy's favor we see the boy's mother receiving a telegram that his grandmother is down with a stroke and that means the boy and his sister and father will be left to look after themselves, and a home without a mother around Christmas time is in itself tragic, but it was that little girl's loneliness, her valiant efforts to please the boy that made his romantic predicaments so laughable. In fact, the Loves that Found Andy Hardy would never have been as funny as they were without the story of the little girl who was "too old for toys and too young for boys."

Often labeled wacky, another term for dizzy or senseless entertainment, much of the artistry that goes into the drama of great comedies like *My Man Godfrey* and *The Three Smart Girls* is completely lost on the serious student.

Even though it is not an easy matter to take seriously a thing called wacky or screwball, the great comedy should be conscientiously studied. The comedy technique being a natural complement of the dramatic, the technique in great comedy production can provide some very interesting answers to better entertainment.

Summed up, the factors that determine the effectiveness of entertainment, whether the reaction sought is serious or hilarious are the same. Meaning that the artistry fundamental to an effective furtherance of

heavy or dramatic pursuits is just as fundamental to an effective furtherance of pursuits that in direct contrast with the dramatic provoke laughter.

Unless there is depth to its drama, an appeal as far-reaching as that of the more impressive dramatic movies, any attempted wackiness in comedy usually falls on its face.

Regarding the importance of drama to comedy, I had just completed several comedies for The Warner Brothers when they found themselves badly in need of another story for Syd Chaplin.

After days of searching through a list of available books and plays I came upon The Better 'Ole, and discovered in that play great comedy "possibilities."

Through the combined efforts of Jack Warner here in Hollywood and his brother Harry in New York the Better 'Ole was secured. But Syd did not like the story. For reasons of his own he could not see it, and a clause in his contract giving him the right to choose his own stories made his okay necessary before we could go ahead.

Finally, after an intense selling campaign and a bit of strategy, we brought him around and our work began in earnest, because the "possibilities" I had discovered in the play were no more than just that. All the play had for the screen was a title, the two principal characters and a locale. We still needed a story.

Darryl Zanuck and I were working on it and we decided to make the personal feud between Old Bill and Little Alf the main conflict, that conflict backgrounded by the greater conflict, the World War. And because the war was the greatest tragedy the world had ever known, there was danger of it submerging the personal conflict, danger of it depressing the audience to the point where laughter would be difficult, one of the problems of getting laughs against tragic backgrounds.

In order to plant that bigger conflict so that it would not obtrude upon the friendly-enemy feud between Bill and Alf, we engaged British actors and real Germans. Casting and property on both sides were made as authentic and realistic as possible.

The next problem was that of furthering the conflict

between Bill and Alf for laughs without hurting the believability of that conflict or making the larger conflict look ridiculous. No forced action, no obvious gags, no false notes, which meant that every gag and situation would have to grow naturally out of what preceded, and from natural or logical causes.

Just to illustrate what I mean, here are two gags out of the many that followed each other in rapid succession from the beginning of the picture through to the end.

During a lull in the fighting the boys put on a show in a little French town back of the lines. They called it "The Blacksmith's Daughter." A rowdy looking Tommy was made up as the daughter. When the action got going the daughter brought the blacksmith his lunch and just as he kissed her a man led in a horse to be shod. The horse was Old Bill and Little Alf sewed up in a horse's skin.

But why not a real horse? Because it was an amateur performance, not professional, and it was their idea of being funny, but it wasn't Bill's or Alf's. They were highly indignant. Playing the part of a horse was not their idea of fun or soldiering, which made the action that much more convincing.

Three contrasts were at work. The stern reality of war, the soldiers' pathetic efforts to put on a show for their comrades and the war forgotten in their ludicrous burlesque, and just as enjoyment of the burlesque became hilarious a grim-faced soldier entered at the back of the opera house. He stood there for a moment, his eyes searching the audience.

Later I checked theatre audience reaction to that soldier's entrance, and it was like an entrance of the grim monster of war itself. The silence that followed was that of the tomb.

Marching down the aisle to his commanding officer the soldier reported that the Germans had broken through. Orders were given to evacuate the town. Trucks filled rapidly and the troops pulled out into the night, the town cleared just as German shells began to find their mark.

Buildings were blown apart, a Church steeple blown to bits, the roof of the opera house partially caved in, debris and scenery burying Bill and Alf.

How in escaping the opera house in the horse's skin Bill and Alf knocked out several German soldiers, how they lined up in that skin with real horses at a watering trough, following the horses when they were led to a tethering place back of an estaminet, the two guards never discovering them, does not sound very convincing, but that action took place at night with just enough light to make horses and men visible to the audience, and the German soldiers were groggy with wine they had stolen from the estaminet.

Laugh followed laugh until the audience was practically exhausted but there would have been few if any laughs if that action had occurred in broad daylight or with guards in full possession of their senses.

Tired out from fighting and filled with wine the two guards fell asleep, giving Bill and Alf an opportunity to cut themselves out of the horsehide, dump the guards into a well and take their uniforms. That situation and the suspense it created, the get-away in a stolen motorbike, then an automobile with airplanes in pursuit and dropping bombs, the auto turning over and pinning Old Bill underneath, brought continuous laughter.

They finally escaped, only to be captured and mistaken for spies by a British regiment not their own and condemned to die. And right there occurred a scene Hollywood will never forget.

When Old Bill stood up before the firing squad and they offered him a handkerchief to place over his eyes and he shook his head with his own countrymen waiting for the command to get ready . . . to aim . . . the audience was held in the grip of really great drama. Yet the Better 'Ole was a Comedy. And you laughed because in writing and directing every gag and sequence leading up to that tremendous climax we held to one simple rule: **If you don't believe the drama of the story you won't laugh at the comedy.**

Charles F. Reisner.  
October 8, 1938.



## PART TWO CHAPTER 8

### Obtrusion and Dilution

Many reasons are advanced for going to the movies, the "escape" theory being a popular one. And no doubt many go to the movies to get away from things that annoy, bore and tire, but there's also the possibility that the public has seen too many movies to expect any escape or solution of things troublesome or unpleasant in that direction.

They say some go to the movies because the picture is recommended, some to be informed on the latest thing cinematic, and a few to analyze, but the critical urge with the greater public is usually confined to the parlor, the poolroom or the cocktail bar.

However, all movie-goers are critics in that both their nature and consciousness automatically challenge the right and wrong of everything, on the screen and off. And therein we discover one of the few important reasons the movies reviewed herein were so successful. They contained very little that consciousness of natural, normal, reasonable behavior could successfully challenge in the premises.

Obviously most people go to the movies because they like the movies, the reason they go to a party, picnic, ballgame or circus; for the kind of diversion that requires little or no exertion; to relax the body and the brain, to open wide the sense pores, to let entertainment flow in like old wine or sunshine. In other words, the public goes to the movies for effortless enjoyment, for something easy to take.

"Yeah, yeah!" scoffs the guy with an axe to grind. "They go to the movies to get away from having to think!" And in these times that's not a bad reason.

In line with putting no strain on audience credulity and making movies easy to take, great movies have adhered inflexibly to the rule that more than two clearly defined forces in conflict cannot be fully enjoyed at the same time, which accounts for their emphasis on the singularity of main pursuits, on enhancing and enlarging that singularity with secondary pursuits of a kindred nature, on keeping furtherance singularly active or passive, on singularity of original reasons for furtherance.

In fact, singularity was so important that little or nothing alien or unrelated to main pursuits was allowed to obtrude upon or dilute an intensive and relentless build-up of singularity.

But perhaps another analogy in the preparation and serving of food will illustrate what is meant by obtrusion and dilution.

A juicy rib-roast is set before guests with side dishes that blend and add to the edibility of the roast, leading guests to expect a completely satisfying dinner. Then for no apparent reason the side dishes are increased way out of proportion to any normal appetite for them, or scant portions of the roast are served, or the guests discover in the roast a strong tint of fish or baloney, or that it is too salty or spicy, those elements destroying the natural flavor of a rib-roast.

When the movie-goer sits down to an evening of movies and the main dish breaks to view it usually offers all the aspects of a very satisfying meal. Fact is, better grade screen dishes that do not start off with a promise of moving the audience to an enthusiastic enjoyment are rare. But then, having gotten a tasty mouthful, the audience is invariably treated to items overdone, or side dishes out of all proportion to expectations or appetite.

In short, one or more of the many ingredients of surefire entertainment, the spice and wine of romance, the baloney of comedy, the glamour in personalities, the very special appeal in hokum, the stimuli in action and melodrama, the awe-inspiring qualities inherent in scenic investitures, all intrinsically appealing, are over-emphasized, obtruding upon and thus diluting appreciation of main pursuit furtherance, the singularity of furtherance, and the singularity of the conflict achieved by that furtherance.

### **Comedy Obtrudes**

War and rumors of war, chief menace in *Lost Horizon*, was timely and timeless in that it was released when the whole world was torn with hatred and greed, with war parked on the doorstep of all nations, the "blindness, the madness, the unintelligence of leadership" intensified in audience consciousness as never before.

Sympathy was not wanting. Ronald Colman's personal appeal is second to none. He was the consul giving aid to helpless women and children in the war-torn Orient. Isabel Jewell, consummate actress, stricken with a lung ailment and not caring whether she lived. Thomas Mitchell, another trouper who asks no odds on talent or personal appeal. John Howard, furthering an honest cause.

As that group fled the orient, the warring troops that menaced their take-off set a really stiff suspense pace for what followed, and that pace was steadily heightened, first by the unknown menace at the controls of the plane, heightened again at the mid-desert fuel station when more troops prevented deplaning and heightened still more the farther they traveled over the forbidding mountainous wastes of Tibet. Then the crash, one casualty, momentary relief, and mystery again took hold.

Who were the strange, parka-shrouded creatures that appeared from nowhere to lead the refugees up that narrow icy trail, into that incredibly beautiful valley, into "a life far, far better than they had ever known before," into a paradise on earth where all fear, hatred, and greed had been banished?

Ushered into the Valley of the Blue Moon, apparently nothing remained to grip the audience. However, consciousness of the perils they had left behind, perils this writer has never seen cameraed so vividly before, still possessed the audience and there was that unbelievable friendliness of Shangri-la still to be accounted for; the philosophical Lamas with a message of hope for all who were afraid, weary and heavy-laden, and now, let Kipling describe Shangri-la:

"They shall work for an age at a sitting and never be tired at all . . . and no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame; but each for the joy of working . . ." And then, in came Edward Everett Horton.

Knowing that a trouper like Edward Everett Horton means laughter any time he steps onto the screen it seems hardly conceivable that he could lessen the entertainment in any picture in which he appeared. In fact, he has given so much to the screen it is hardly sporting to mention a picture in which he has de-

tracted. But in a movie in which "escape"—a universal pursuit—means escape from fears pressing in on that greater movie-going mass always seeking a Shangri-la, anything that takes away from the dignity or beauty of that Shangri-la, once it has been revealed to them, is bound to let the audience down. Comedy of surefire caliber invariably does.

Our top comedy troupers, those cast as featured comedy relief, cannot execute the most trivial business, cannot pick up a teaspoon, or register the most fleeting of reactions without provoking laughter. And now let us consider an observation from *Variety* on comedy as an obtrusive factor:

"The film pursues a somewhat checkered career, letting down for a space after the middle of the picture and not completely recovering until the ending. Its first half is by far its best part. In a **false effort to save itself** it has taken aboard a crazy poet (Hugh Herbert) who strikes a false note in a play which is otherwise **sound and plausible**. (Bold ours). Every other character is quite within reason, and while Mr. Herbert is funny he does a great deal of damage in an otherwise sound comedy plot."

If Hugh Herbert, a comedian, can hobble the effectiveness of a **sound comedy plot**, what can Edward Everett Horton do to a movie that bids for a lasting and profound reaction, a movie like *Lost Horizon*, that carried a much-needed message of kindness and tolerance to a world needing that message as never before in its history?

Jimmy Fidler reports that Horton is a certain director's luckpiece and there is no discounting this genteel comedian's versatility, but he was anything but a rabbit's foot to *Lost Horizon's* chances of being named the greatest for all time.

If memory serves right, Edward Everett Horton was seen but rarely heard in the original screen version of *Holiday*, one of our really great movies. But lest we forget, Capra and Riskin also gave us *It Happened One Night*, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* and *You Can't Take It With You*.

Having reduced laugh-getting to pretty much of an exact science one would assume that Hollywood has audience laughter at its bidding, yet 65 per cent of

an audience won't laugh out loud at anything no matter how much the rest of the audience laughs. And that reticent or go-ahead-and-make-me-laugh element contains the many who too often laugh in the wrong place, which introduces Hollywood's number one headache, filtering out the unwanted laughs.

Laughter in the wrong place is the most disillusioning thing that can happen to a movie and the most destructive to a good movie. Laughter being highly infectious, a cynical laugh picked up by an easily entertained element in an audience can absolutely ruin a good picture's chances of a favorable notice.

Sad to say it isn't the obviously amusing things that trouble the author and director, much of which is sensed and elided long before it reaches the cameras and sound recorders.

Unsuspected under and over emphasis, unsuspected whimsy and distortion picked up by the camera, faintly ludicrous contrasts that cannot possibly be visualized in the scripting cause most of the unwanted laughter.

Invariably, somewhere in the continuity of a movie, exaggerations, unwitting expositions accentuating human frailties, foibles and fallacies will creep into the action at the wrong time, requiring constant vigilance in writing and directing to prevent.

This inability to recognize in scripting and shooting the things that later cause unwanted mirth brings to mind an incident in one of the better movies where rebel forces were carrying on their operations underground. Because of an alert surveillance of enemy patrols above and around them on every thoroughfare and byway, secrecy and quiet were imperative. All of which was adequately and therefore most effectively pictured. Then a traitor doomed to die by his own hand made his escape and a fusillade of shots followed, booming and echoing through the empty streets, noise enough to waken the dead, but nary a patrol showed up.

In still another instance the heroine was desperately in need of money. The hero, her lover, had none, and no prospects of getting any, which left the streets the only way open to her.

Riven by her desperation the hero tore from a billboard a poster offering a fairish reward for the capture

of his best pal, and in the ensuing struggle with his conscience the wind hurled that poster under his and the heroine's feet no less than three times and thrice it was kicked and brushed away. Once in the camera would have been ample because the struggle with his conscience had already been adequately portrayed.

The thin partition between tragedy and burlesque or farce bellied dangerously, but action was so swift laughter was stilled before it had a chance to escape.

Acting and direction in *Holiday* (original screen version) was keenly alive to the dangers of over and under emphasis, furtherance of business and social careers, as well as the desire to live being micro-critically conscious of how completely comedy can weaken the hard-earned grip a play has secured with the larger conflict. The comedy, gayety and horseplay in *Holiday* concerned itself mainly with hiding hurts and disappointment.

In 42nd Street there were no laughs when the director popped the vaudeville actor on the chin for romantic sabotage. In enlarging the problems of musical production, in scoring and registering its petty harassments the camera and mike gave him plenty of cause for ringing the gong on the trouble maker.

When the Champ bashed his knuckles against the brick wall of his prison, a self-inflicted atonement for his own worthlessness, that business was in itself overt and therefore ridiculous, yet justified, because the Champ had fought a good fight against booze and dice.

Thus we discover that over and under emphasis is nothing more than too much or not enough motivation, reason or cause for actors saying and doing the things they say and do. With the wrong emphasis always harmless or innocuous, laughter is bound to result.

In general, much of over and under emphasis resulting in laughter is an over and under estimation of the power and efficiency of camera and microphone, expecting either too much or too little of those two devices.

But that mistake is easily excused because no writer known has yet been able to visualize in the scripting, the immediate and passing effect upon an audience of backgrounds, personalities and incidental furtherance of pursuits as critically as the lens and microphone.

And now let us consider an analysis by one of our colleagues relative to comedy as an obtrusive factor in another Capra-Riskin movie:

"You Can't Take It With You promised to be an inspiring variation of Holiday's reverence for riches versus the desire to live; the variation occurring in the desire to live being expressed in "doing what one has always wanted most to do," or members of a large family pursuing, uninterrupted, their individual hobbies.

"There was a wife and mother writing plays that would never be produced, her husband manufacturing fireworks in the basement, assisted by an iceman who had stopped in to look on ten years before and forgot to leave. A human adding machine, a Mr. Zero, who liked to 'make up things' and became a member of the family. A daughter studying ballet, her husband on the xylophone. A grandfather who went up in the elevator thirty years before, turned around and went down and never went back to work again. He sat around with a bandaged foot, playing the harmonica and philosophizing on everything that came to his attention.

"His granddaughter was in love with her employer's son, scion of a great banking family. The banker-father needed badly the land upon which the girl's family lived, a parcel that spelled success or failure for the most important piece of financing in the family's history.

"The rich-boy-poor-girl-romance was complicated by rich boy's family calling on poor girl's family the night before they were expected, and by seeing her family at their worst, as they were every day and not fixed up for company.

"Appeal inherent in doing what we want most to do is as far reaching as Holiday's desire to live, but that pursuit was not enhanced and enlarged by dialog, the medium that gave the desire to live in Holiday so much of its appeal. The hobbies the heroine's family wanted most to pursue were not talked of. They were pictured, realized. Holiday's desire to live was anticipated. For inherent or induced appeal realization can never equal anticipation.

"But supposing that actually doing what they want-

ed most to do equalled the appeal in Holiday's desire to live. Was anything equivalent to Holiday's spirit-killing same thing day in and day out and piling up money threatening enjoyment of their hobbies? No. They had no money worries at all, and the banker put no serious dampener on their fun.

"What then specifically threatened uninterrupted enjoyment of doing what they wanted most to do? The granddaughter's romance was broken up by the premature visit of the rich boy's family, so the girl went away, leaving her family saddened. But grandfather had an easy solution for that. They would pack up and move to where she had fled.

"Neither did grandfather in refusing to tell the rich boy where the girl was hiding present any problem. All the boy had to do was trail the moving van. Thus with nothing of any consequence hindering, where was the grip on audience emotions comparable to that secured by things that got in the way of Holiday's desire to live?

"As far as furtherance was concerned, the action was hoked the whole distance. The contrasts achieved by the old banking family calling on the hobbyists was as antipodal as Fernand Gravet and Patsy Kelly. The fireworks explosion and rich-man-poor-man jugged in the same cell with a clot of riff-raff was contrived. Mischa Auer's tag, "It steenks!" was formula. A great banker unaware that his son was in love with the granddaughter of the man who refused to sell the piece of property he so badly needed was patently situational. The long arm of coincidence was plainly visible in the girl's family holding the case ace in that deal. And a suicide bringing home to the banker the truth that you can't take it with you was twenty-thirty.

"Allowing, finally, that in members of the family doing what each wanted to do it was just a menagerie of fun, and characterized selfishness in the wacky manner of My Man Godfrey, then who characterized Godfrey's unselfishness? The old Grandfather? Hardly. He was doing exactly what he wanted to do.

"It follows then that You Can't Take It With You was designed solely for laughs. In which case where were the depths from which laughs sounded compar-



able to the weightier factors that made wackiness so wacky in *My Man Godfrey*?"

The answer to that analysis is this:

Everybody undoubtedly has something in mind they would like most to do. That idea is in itself tremendously appealing, but when that idea emerges into action as it did in *You Can't Take It With You*, its appeal narrows to those few who like ballet, manufacturing firecrackers in the basement, writing plays, playing the xylophone and philosophy.

Along with that, always doing the thing we want most to do is impractical. In other words full-time hobby-riding is an absurdity. However, the play had to stage those hobbies with real people and in surroundings familiar to everyone, which only served to accentuate their absurdity.

With the idea upon which the stage play was based too impractical for conviction, with a minimum of believability in prospect, there was only one course left open to scripter and director. They had to exaggerate the variations of doing what one wants most to do for all the laughs they could get, and in so doing Capra and Riskin were saying: "Yes, we know it's silly, but isn't it swell fun?"

True that dialog might have given those hobbies the appeal of Holiday's desire to live, but how could those hobbies in the wanting bring about a banker's conversion to the philosophy of getting a little fun out of life? It takes a heap of actual happiness to convert a dispeptic Gibraltar of Finance to anything but accumulating wealth and power because that pursuit means happiness to him to the same extent it does to others. And piling up money, wealth, power, becoming important is a universal pursuit, universally appealing. Maybe it shouldn't be but it is just the same.

Regarding *My Man Godfrey* there was nothing absurd in the so-called wackiness of the family he worked for. For the kind of idle rich they were, sophisticated mocking birds whose lives were given to a continual round of parties, night life and slumming, that family's behavior was most normal.

In *You Can't Take It with You*, members of the family actually doing what each wanted most to do,

was absurd. No amount of exaggeration could have obtruded for that very reason. In short an absurdity cannot obtrude upon an absurdity.

Escape from "a world torn with hatred and greed," Lost Horizon's main sympathetic pursuit, was much desired by the whole world. But where is there any escape, any real haven of peace or safety from war and rumors of war? Where but in Shangri-la, that mythical world of tolerance and understanding, of doing unto others as we would have others do unto us, existing only in our imagination. And so Capra and Riskin pictured it, as a dream-world, not tied in or contrasted with anything mundane. It was pictured as remote from every day reality as it exists in our imagination, a Utopia that because of its ethereal qualities is easily grounded by worldly fun-making.

### Romance Obtrudes

Despite Edward Everett Horton's surefire comedy technique, suspense in the first half of Lost Horizon increased that movie's grip with the effectiveness of oncoming artillery, an approaching tornado, and there was little relief or let-down when the refugees were rescued because the answer to why they had been shanghaied into a dream-world was expertly withheld. But despite that withholding, critics were unanimous on let-down, many claiming suspense was discharged by the Colman-Wyatt love idyll.

Just what did the love idyll in Lost Horizon do to suspense? For the moment here is an answer from one of our more prominent critics:

"The superb camera work and the splendid editing in those early chapters pile up the thrills and whip up the melodrama to such a pace that when the actual dialog sequences begin you do not feel the dramatic letdown until Mr. Colman and the pleasant Jane Wyatt begin a vastly unimportant and pace-killing love idyll."

Obviously that warring world outside Shangri-la, the flight over the Tibetan mountains with an unknown pilot at the wheel, the struggle up the tortuous icy trail where one misstep meant death, and the mystery of that paradise on earth, Shangri-la, left our critic totally unmoved, the friendliness of the people of Shangri-la, their willingness to answer any and all

questions regarding their mysterious paradise just so many "dialog sequences."

Now psychologists agree, or do they, that the one emotion universal is the fear of falling, said fear increasing with the distance we put between ourselves and solid footing.

True or not, Harold Lloyd in *Safety Last* played no long shot on audience appreciation when he hung for torturous minutes to the moving hand of a steeple clock with nothing but the breeze between himself and the macadam some twenty flights below.

If Harold Lloyd took no chances on holding his audience what about Capra and Riskin air-touring their audience across those Tibetan alps in midwinter?

In *Safety Last* Lloyd at least had something more or less earth-connected to hang onto and he was in his home town, but in the Capra-Riskin thriller the refugees sailed at several thousand flights over a foreign land in a direction opposite the one they wanted to go, and with nothing but snow-swept wilderness below.

An unknown pilot at the controls, threatening them with a gun, banditti below and behind and a vast uncharted, winter-lashed mountainous region ahead, the icy trail up the mountain sides and then suddenly, the sun-washed Valley of the Blue Moon, the strange and beautiful architecture that towered over and around them like fairy castles in a dream-world.

No amount of writing genius could do justice to that perilous journey, the terrifying majesty of the Tibetan alps, the breath-taking grandeur of Shangri-la's templed hills. It took camera and projection machine to give those perils and mysteries reality. Modern science in the darkened theatres of the nation made it possible for millions of people to actually live through every moment of those harrowing experiences, with the result that *Lost Horizon* held its audiences in a firm and increasing grip for such a long period that neither the dialog sequences nor the love idyll could have let them down, even if the Colman-Wyatt romance had carried on longer than it did.

Obviously the critic quoted was completely oblivious of the audience, nor had he any natural or trained appreciation of what was obtaining in audience consciousness. Finally, and regardless of the need for

sociate readily with a singular role in life itself; and eccentric types, which, according to conventional type standards are exaggerations of stock types. In short, stock types are straight dramatic or melodramatic types while eccentric types are in the majority outright caricatures of stock types.

Regarding support troupers only one conclusion can be drawn: In the main they are master craftsman, each a tested, proven piece of merchandise.

Many have served a long gruelling apprenticeship in the theatre, many in the kerosene circuits, and back there in tank-town stock, under canvas, walking the boards, walking the ties, walking the weary round of producers' offices they left the ham in their Hamlets, their intensities, reciting, chest-heaving, scenery-gnawing, mugging and declaiming.

Out of the crude years they distilled a thing called "living their role," indeed, living a role became a prime necessity. The skimpy roles doled out to support people got no notices unless they were lived to the hilt. As a result they brought to the screen a seasoned equipment, a sensitiveness, a spontaneity and naturalness that makes them as believable in one role as another.

Whatever their pose, be it gay or sad, knowing or bewildered, it is rarely forced. Every change of mood, no matter how fleeting or permanent, becomes a thing of immediate reality. In timing, transitions, discovery, take, humor, pointing or any other element of delivery, there is no reaching, striving or straining for effect. What they say and do on the screen comes as close to reality as anything possibly can in the world of make-believe. They are troupers. And we may add, anyone indifferent to smooth trouping does not attend the theatre or their numbers do not count.

Now there may be only a million movie-goers or so who like the Mary Boland, Alice Brady or Billie Burke personalities, and an entirely different million who prefer Spring Byington, May Robson or Laura Hope Crewes, as types. In fact support-trouper likes and dislikes are just as pronounced as star likes and dislikes, but when it comes to support trouping, no prejudice is possible.

Regardless of type, if a support trouper's role con-

tains anything worth expressing he will hold his audience, and if there happens to be any appreciable amount of meat in his role he will send his audience home boosting. In fact, support troupers with fat roles have a habit of clicking for results that are terribly disturbing to our stars. But "stealing" the picture represents only a small part of the havoc wrought by smoothe trouping in the support ranks.

When the sound frequency wizards made the screen audible—changing the whole entertainment picture—actors departed Broadway and hinterland stock companies like boarders leaving a ravaged dinner table; and Hollywood got the pick of the nation's best support troupers.

Having won the approval of discriminating theatre-goers—drama-devotees educated in the finished performance—they were bound to add tone and authority to screen acting. Post-grads in their art, they could not fail to heighten appreciation of regular movie fans, and they did start a fresh tidal wave of interest in the movies. But better than that, their trouping put an entirely new face on old movie fare, on old threadbare plots long familiar to the regulars. Then look what happened:

Cameras and sound recorders began to weed and grade and only the best of the best support people surviving, individual troupers established new highs at the box office, support creating a "demand" of nationwide proportions. And what business, art or profession in its more lucid moments will ignore a demand for something it has in stock?

Whether or not the build-up of individuals will mean that development of anything bigger than individual roles is to become one of the lost arts, is beyond prediction.

And now, if the reader will recall one or more support troupers and the movies in which their work stood out, he has put his finger on the reason the judges failed to appreciate his enthusiasm for those movies.

Among other things disqualifying potentially "great" movies is the stand-out support role, or roles, the picture "stolen" by one or two character people who outshine the star, topping all other featured players,

dominating action with the prolongation, the sheer genuineness or outright brilliance of their trouping.

Excess and excellence of smoothe or brilliant individual support trouping has been one of the major deterrents to progress in movie production, holding playwriting and direction at a standstill much too long, yet we can be most thankful for both the excess and the excellence. It has halted progress at a higher entertainment level than ever before.

### Transitions Obtrude

Prisoners. (Russian made). "They're trying in Russia to evolve new films with greater box office appeal on a universal scale. That's commendable, but in so doing they're stepping backwards, because they are neglecting the thing wherein Russia has always stood at the head of the parade—photography and montage. Those last few films that have come over from Russia are not only dull scenarically to non-believers but are distinctly inferior from a technical standpoint." (Kauf.)

"Swing High, Swing Low. (Paramount) Camera and general technique click throughout, including some brief but punchy montage by Farciot Edouart, who has so skillfully blended his special camera affects—the booming notes from the trumpet, the champagne bubbles, etc.—that it's almost a part of the plot. The increasing usages, of late, of unobtrusive but well-fitting montage to interpret dramatic screen moods incidentally points the way to a new and finer film art." (Abel.)

In one sense montage means flashes of action, people and backgrounds super-imposed one upon the other, picturing in the briefest space of time possible, action and events taking place over a longer period of time. More specifically, a close-up of a clock, the revolving hands measuring off the hours as the dirty work takes place unseen; the burnt ends of cigars and cigarettes piling up in an ash tray while the victim is being third-degreed or waiting for the fatal stroke of eleven, are time lapses. Montage is a time lapse, also, with super-imposed flashes of the action taking place during the lapse.

The gay, mad whirl of night life lends itself beautifully to montage or vice versa, but to what effect this

writer is at a loss to describe. Very little of movie montage is cited for its efficiency. In fact those two notices by Abel and Kauf practically total the praise a year of movie montage commands, and not because of its rarity. On the contrary, it is the movie with no montage at all that is rare.

Any movie depicting any part of the life hectic failing to employ whirling champagne bottles, a panorama of blazing night club neon signs in Times Square, a cacaphony of ermine-wrapped and top-hatted revelers, blaring and whining clarinets, tooting taxi horns and shrieking brakes, milling crowds and scanty-pantied choruses of shapely females, apparently does not count. The din-din-night-life transition is as standard as noble deceptions and sacrifices, a running gag or a six-shooter that never has to be reloaded. But we repeat, to what extent the artistry or esthetics of montage intensify furtherance of main pursuits, or anything else that montage endeavors to accentuate, is hard to figure out.

If we remember correctly the original montage came from Germany, novel when new, and exciting, if a jumble of action flashes that never pause long enough to register deeper than the retina, can be called exciting; but that novelty quickly wore off. With rare exceptions the montage viewed today is trite at its best, annoying even, irritating in fact, if, as in some of the better movies, it is used to induce or provoke sympathy, or heighten suspense.

None of the movies we reviewed at length, with the exception of *It Happened One Night* and *Lost Horizon*, employed any montage, and in *One Night* the clattering, whirring presses and headlines could hardly be called montage as generally conceived. Newspapers and radio were the only mediums through which the father could hope to contact those in flight.

In *Lost Horizon*, none of the major menace, war and the elements, "the blindness, the madness, the unintelligence of leadership," were in evidence in the montage picturing Colman's struggle to regain Shangri-la.

In those final stanzas, headlines, newsboys shouting, people shouting, "Conway has disappeared!" and clubmen discussing his disappearance contained none

of the perils Conway and his brother experienced when shanghaied out of the warring world or the icy, winter-lashed mountain trails they braved when they escaped Shangri-la.

Incidentally, once an audience is made acutely conscious of impending or surrounding dangers and is then fed a second-hand or intermediary expression of those dangers, grip loosens to the point where no ordinary stimulant can restore it. When Conway was finally seen in a swirling blizzard within sight of the archway to the Valley of the Blue Moon, Lost Horizon's climactic grip had been dissipated in montage.

In passing, we might mention that when audience reaction remains static or is suspended for any length of time the longer that suspension the longer it takes to discharge. In that sense the perils braved by Conway and the refugees held the audience so long, no mild or momentary obtrusion could discharge them. But **discussion** of Conway's disappearance and the montage picturing the danger that threatened his return to Shangri-la was neither momentary nor mild, considering the nature and character of Horizon's message.

Offered a choice position in Wall Street the hero in Holiday had the audience high with the hope that he would turn it down; ending in dismay when he was "brought around" to a reverence for riches. But the time lapse covering his surrender, seemingly causing a slight dip in the suspense curve, merely leveled it off. Even interpreted technically as a let-down it was of such short duration, with no forces alien to either the desire to live or reverence for riches obtruding, there was no harm done.

The stand taken by daughter and father prior to their brief triumph wasn't moderated in the slightest when the boy turned his back on business and society. And when he decided to go on alone, furtherance of his pursuit was just as hot as it was when he dropped it.

In many cases, audience reaction becomes so highly static nothing short of a prolonged obtrusion of comedy, romance, hokum or action unrelated to the forces achieving that static, can ground the audience, or effect a total discharge of hopes and fears already generated.



In short, grip of any intensity or duration cannot be loosened by a time fade or time lapse, providing forces originally opposing or responsible for that grip are immediately brought into conflict. However, the original character and position of those forces must be rigorously and faithfully preserved.

### Production Obtrudes.

"It is a lavish production, abounding in massive out-of-door scenes, hundred of players, elaborate and highly decorative interiors, intricate mechanical devices and effects, camera tricks, panoramic views, sepia tints . . . production values reach a high and spectacular standard . . . mountings are of exceptional pretensions . . . such merit as the picture possesses is found in a series of well executed episodes aboard a transatlantic liner steaming at full speed into a field of icebergs . . . a pitched battle magnificently and thrillingly staged . . . locomotives and coaches of 50 years ago have been faithfully reproduced . . . much of the investiture is a lavish night club sequence on a mammoth scale. It's a triple deck set with camera and crane scooping up glamour, grandeur and confusion . . . spectacle becomes pretty hefty at moments . . . handsomely mounted and forcefully photographed glorification of dancing . . . a succession of brilliant backgrounds, exciting exhibit of torso and gams, gorgeous costuming . . . picture will get much art attention with its top notch color photography and pictorial technique."

The foregoing observations are clips from Variety's reviews of last year's movies. We follow now with their effect upon the story:

"The director was more intrigued with the grandeur of the snowy mountain tops than he was with the story . . . frequently the production effects are far more moving than the characters . . . the mass impresses as superficial pomp . . . the scenery has no relation whatever to the story and therefore would have been better in a short . . . as an incident apart from the rest of the picture it is an outstanding and memorable spectacle, but because it has nothing much to do with the climax of the story itself it prompts very little emotional response . . . building of the rail-

road exemplified a national spirit which refused defeat and welded an empire . . . upon those stirring facts the director, too engrossed in the scenery, devotes little time and less skill . . . some of this scenic footage is superlative but it serves only by contrast to accentuate the deficiencies of casting and the puerility of the plot."

Production in *The Great Ziegfeld* was stunningly costumed choruses of singers and dancers on a colossal, spiralling ramp with its tip in the starry heavens and other breath-taking ensembles. In San Francisco the earthquake and the fire. In *The Good Earth* the drouth and locust scenes, the military and the mob. In *Old Chicago*, the fire; in *The Hurricane*, the hurricane, and in only one instance did those values obtrude upon, retard or scatter a rising interest in main events and that was in *The Good Earth*.

The initial destructive force in *The Good Earth*, drouth, had had its day when locusts swarmed into action. At that point however, not locusts but Wang Lung's inhumanity was in the ascendant.

The locust invasion was in itself an awesome and fearful spectacle, the havoc wrought, whole sections of grain destroyed and scores of humans prostrated, faded everything else into insignificance, making Olan's dumb suffering and the build-up of Wang Lung's self-esteem inconsequential in contrast, incidental, not overwhelming. Nothing could have topped that locust invasion as an obtrusive force.

In *The Great Ziegfeld*, production was the main sympathetic pursuit, the story of the rise and decline of the late Florenz Ziegfeld, high priest of glamour a name symbolical of production throughout the world of the theatre. Master showman, how he would have enjoyed Metro-Goldwin-Mayer's spiralling ramp kissing the sky.

In San Francisco, Blackie, the hero, became a local Caesar, a dictator with an ever tightening grip on the political destinies of a great city, a power that grew to such proportions nothing less than an earthquake and a citywide fire could curb it.

Production can be as compelling as an undraped female and quite as effective in taking audience mind off furtherance of main pursuits, yet strange to

say, dawdling and dalliance with camera is so infrequent that this writer in scanning hundreds of the better pictures has found few instances where production actually obtruded.

In this matter of keeping production values in their proper place or in the background where they belong, passively aiding and hindering furtherance, directors and lens artists deserve a few salvos of applause. Particularly when one considers their temptations, the choicest and rarest of properties, ancient and modern, on requisition; the world's finest technicians in design, construction and painting, composing and fabricating their camera dishes.

### Hokum Obtrudes

What is hokum?

Here is a definition from the dictionary:

"Any word, act, business, or property, used by an actor, that succeeds in arousing the **approval** or provoking the **laughter** of an audience."

In other words, anything that can produce a definitely favorable, a sympathetic or pleasant reaction, emotion, feeling, desire or consciousness in an audience is hokum. Here are a few samples:

A broad distinction may be drawn between romance for the lustier reasons and wooing for marriage, or home-making, but any quibbling outside of that is pure blarney.

Romance in entertainment is the male and female get-together with whatever sex implications the author, director or actor gives it, or the Hays' code allows.

Despite religious theories, racial ideas and moral attitudes on the subject, sex is as positive or negative and attracts or repels as definitely as the opposite poles of an electric magnet, and is at the same time quite as obvious and baffling in its phenomena, a living, pulsating paradox, yet sensed exactly for what it is by everybody.

Be it slick or awkward, timid or bold, gentle or hearty, young or old, triangled, quadrangled or octangled; call it pristine bundling or goona-goona, sex in entertainment is the most powerful stimulant to imagination, desire, feeling and emotion known, and in the final analysis the appeal inherent in the pursuit of

romance is mainly sexual.

Crime. The word itself compels attention, excites interest. Crime! And we are on guard, every instinct of self preservation awakened. Consciousness of how much law and its enforcement have been corrupted, knowledge "that an unseen thumb is always tilting the scales of justice," intensifying our inherent fear of the criminal, makes crime surefire in provoking sympathy.

Dangers inherent in the elements, the wind, rain, snow, lightning, the hurricane, blizzard and cyclone.

Deception, secrecy, partial mystery or letting the audience in on something of which one or more of the characters are unaware; complete mystery or whodunit.

Action; the chase and ambush; dangerous stunting, narrow escapes, scaling the heights, exploring the depths, collisions and smashups; speeding, careening ambulances, fire trucks, police cars; gunfire, death.

Production, or spectacle, pomp, lavishness of display, striking decorations, big scale investiture, size, class, flash, unique staging and costuming, pageantry and tableaux, mass movement of property, people and animals, tourist and travelog values.

Comedy: From the sublime to the ridiculous, the lofty to the commonplace; harmless and innocuous exaggerations and expositions designed for surefire laughter.

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Romance, adventure, crime, mystery, comedy, action, exciting personalities, production, music and dancing are high concentrates of entertainment, the very essence of Hokum, as exhilarating as black coffee, or champagne. In fact those stimulants are used right along to resuscitate weak and wobbly movies, to fuse them with new life, to quicken a lagging interest.

When does hokum obtrude?

In Chris Bean, furthering possession and dispossession of the valuable paintings were the two main pursuits. Upon the outcome of that conflict depended the happiness of three adults and two children, romance-bound.

In the screen version, just as the maid's struggle to keep the paintings approached a final test of its legality, with suspense pitched at peak tension, for no

reason at all she went suddenly mawkish, handed the kids her savings, bundled them into an old struggle-buggy, cranked it up and leaped aside to give the honeymooners a rousing send-off. Then the flivver suddenly developed a bad attack of laryngitis and she was forced to push it half way down the lane getting the lovers onto the High Road to Romance.

In reading that sentimental obtrusion it isn't any too comical, but rest assured, getting that wobbly flivver off to a fair start had the audience in stitches. A really capable comedienne, the late Marie Dressler, did the heaving and grunting.

Whether or not that bit of obvious hoke hurt the screen version's chances at the annual poll cannot be determined. The point is, helping the lovers removed one of the reasons for the struggle to possess the treasured paintings at a time when suspense was keyed at its highest. And the youngsters' romance, being strictly in the sex-appeal stage, the maid's love for the deceased artist transcending it so completely, the hoke obtrusion became outright sacrilege.

In other words hokum obtrudes when it is used deliberately to enhance or enlarge a pursuit it is not primarily furthering.

The daughter's romance was one of the principal factors inspiring the doctor to get possession of the paintings. In other words the romance, a secondary expression of greed, motivated dispossession, not possession.

Hoking furtherance of a clearly defined main pursuit with stimulants of a known potency and distinctly unrelated to that pursuit produces the same reaction in an audience a football game does when the teams halt play for a round of poker, or a poker game is halted to indulge in a bit of romancing or clowning.

Football, poker and romance, exciting in themselves, are a pain in the neck when a hard-earned interest has been worked up in any one of them, and one of the others interrupt or obtrude, unless of course the interruption or obtrusion definitely hinders. In which event hokum is not an ally.

When does hokum not obtrude?

In *The Three Smart Girls* the three adolescents, reviving memories of the cute things said and done when

kids of seven and eight, was pure hokum, designed to provoke sympathy, singularizing paternity, ties that bind, one of the main pursuits.

In *Over the Hill* the tender mothering of a flock of unruly kids, getting their necks and ears washed in time for school, was hokum, singularizing mother love, service and sacrifice, one of the main sympathetic pursuits.

In *She Done Him Wrong*, rescuing the innocent country girl from white slavery was hokum. Haggling with the owner of the mission building over the price of a diamond lavalier and then literally giving it to him at his own price to save the mission chief from eviction, was hokum. But those acts of commiseration and charity, though alien to the nature and character of a Diamond Lil, furthered her courting, the main sympathetic pursuit.

In *My Man Godfrey* the hero's interest in the jobless was hokum deluxe but at no time sticky. In fact, his night club on the city dump turned out to be a very profitable venture. His curtain sermon to the Vengeful One on snobbery and selfishness was a certified tear-jerker, but that particular spasm of moralizing was anti-climactic, and solved the mystery of Godfrey's butling and living on the city dump, one of the main pursuits.

Mr. Deeds doling out millions to jobless farmers for land, tools and seed, was hokum, but that doling was a main pursuit. Incidentally, Deeds carefully secured his loans, each one, with notes and mortgages. (Interest rate wasn't mentioned.) The lovely newspaper reporter, using Deeds' particular depravity for a headline, was hokum with a big H, but strictly in line of duty, and probing Deeds' sanity, a main pursuit.

When Theodora shielded the young lady married to the college lad, that big sister stuff was hokum, but it intensified scandal. In placing the gurgling offspring of the college romance in the arms of its natural grandmother—the perpetually scandalized busybody who led the attack on Theodora's literary efforts—that act topped a sweeping victory over smug fear of scandal, a main pursuit.

Incarcerating the hero and heroine in *Ladies of the Big House* on the eve of their nuptials for a crime of

which they were innocent was a guaranteed sob-provoker, but incarceration was a main pursuit, providing original and continuous motive for escape.

When we saw Madelon Claudet deserted by her lover, and to give her unborn son a name forced to marry a man she did not love, and on top of that serve a stretch in prison for a crime of which she knew nothing, we witnessed three surefire bids for sympathy. Purpose? Creating a main pursuit, a past black enough to make concealment of that past really mean something. De-basing herself to procure money for her son's education was hokum, but that abasement was essential to a small part in her son's life, a main pursuit.

In Five Star Final the business of digging up a past better left buried actually clanged and rattled with the mechanics of deliberate sympathy provocation, but that action was essential to the successful furtherance of yellow journalism, a main pursuit.

When the author of Street Scene sicked the butcher boy bully onto the cringing hero, with the hero bewailing his own cowardice, he eliminated the hero as a last possible aid to the heroine when her father killed her mother. That act in itself was pure hoke, but in cutting her off from all aid, casting her into the world alone, he completed the triumph of disapprobation of cheating, a variation of a main pursuit.

In It Happened One Night the hero gave his last dollar to a waif, essence of hokum, but necessary handicapping because his interest in the runaway heiress was entirely selfish, her desire for the titled gigolo willfully so. Incidentally, their flight needed all the continuous provocation of sympathy it could arouse to achieve any depth or reach as far as the greater audience was concerned. Helping others was a main pursuit.

In the Divorcee the woman disfigured in the auto wreck was a living indictment of man's fickle nature, provoking sympathy for all and sundry victims of that nature, and pure hoke, but essential to a high singularization of the double standard, a main pursuit.

In short, hokum can not obtrude upon furtherance of a main pursuit, when in character with, or identified as an aid to that pursuit.

That an inordinate reaching for laughs and tears is

not uncommon to the screen is brought out in the remarkably few instances where Variety cites a picture that isn't making the deliberate bid. One follows:

"The Young in Heart" (United Artists) takes its title from the little old woman whose pathetic eagerness for companionship touches the affections of a conniving and indolent family. When she meets them on a Paris train after they have been exposed and expelled from a Riviera resort, she is captivated by their tall tales of troubles and delighted with their courage in their predicament.

It is the simple and rather wistful paradox of the story of course, that while the tiny old heroine sees her sponging guests as 'young in heart,' it is actually she who is so. And it is this young in heart quality in her that endears her to the grafting family and eventually brings about their reformation. It is this quality, too, which has enchanted the director and cast and which will be irresistibly winning to an audience.

Under Richard Wallace's direction, the fragile story is never permitted to lapse into bathos. The humor and sentiment is ingeniously blended so that the picture is gay without being arch, and tender without being saccharine. Its characters are human and true and it is shot through with laughter, yet it will leave, as they say, not a dry eye in the house. (Hobe.)

And now, the other extreme:

"The Storm" (Universal): Thoroughly hokey but reasonably entertaining he-man thriller, about shipboard wireless operators. Loaded with enough rock-em-and-sock-em action to supply a whole Dick Tracy series, including several shipwrecks, fires, drunken brawls, a shipboard appendectomy by radio instructions, a flock of slugfests, romance, a brother-against-brother angle—and oh yes, a storm at sea.

There's nothing much more to say about 'The Storm,' except that it's a typically proficient Hollywood job of making acceptable Class B entertainment out of a script-writer's file of rip-roaring melodrama. It's never for a moment plausible, but on the other hand it's almost never dull. (Hobe.)



## CHAPTER 9

### Seeing and Believing

For twenty notoriously profitable years action, personalities and backgrounds supported this billion-dollar industry without one word of spoken dialog. But what was it that made the silent screen so much more effective than, for example, the screen's traditional rivals, the stage, fiction and radio?

In a nutshell, word pictures, written or oral, are never quite distinct. Though often enlivened by sketch or photograph, faces and backgrounds in a book quickly recede, fading the moment idea or action is projected.

The stage face, under the most favorable of lighting conditions, is a blurred image to 75 per cent of the audience. Radio faces and backgrounds are merely voices and sound effects, while the camera and projection machine bring people and backgrounds to within ten feet of everybody in the theatre, as close to those in the far reaches of the second and third galleries as those in the orchestra circle.

Granted that people, action, properties and scenery are not real, that everything and everybody on the screen is an illusion, nevertheless that illusion is a close-up, living, ever-present bid for appreciation. In short, if a still picture is worth a thousand words, then a moving picture is worth ten thousand.

However, despite the fact that the camera still dictates what is what on the screen, dialog has its advocates, nor are they few in numbers nor modest in their defense of dialog as an entertainment medium. And so we find production today, a camp divided, rarely agreeing on which can best enhance and enlarge main pursuits, the camera or dialog.

All mediums of expression work under a handicap of remoteness or distance from the actualities and realities they attempt to picture. There is the handicap of the written or spoken word without pictures, the handicap of pictures without movement, the handicap of the moving picture without sound.

Word picture, (oral or written), still picture, moving picture. That is the order of their ability to visualize a thought, an idea, a desire, a person, action or back-

ground. And that means exactly what it says: Order of ability, not order of importance, because dialog, the most inadequate of picture mediums, is just as important as the moving picture when used wisely and for its particular effectiveness.

Being relatively inadequate as a visualizer, limited in its ability to picture anything as clearly and distinctly as the camera, dialog is peculiarly fitted to keep an abstraction, an indefinite article, idea or pursuit consistently indefinite, thus giving it much of appeal or non-appeal it would not have if actually pictured. Such an article was the "desire to live," one of the main pursuits in *Holiday*.

Because treatment of that pursuit in the original screen version is an outstanding example of the efficiency of dialog when used wisely let us review it again.

The hero wanted to save part of his life for himself—the young part. He wanted to retire young and work old. He wanted time off from what he was doing and had been doing day in and day out; time to find out who he was and what goes on and what about it.

No matter how often one reads that last paragraph, how closely one examines it for something specific in the way of happiness, it isn't there.

In short, happiness as contemplated by the hero was in the abstract, the variations of his desire to live as expressed by secondary characters also in the abstract. And because they were, because the desire to live as contemplated by most of us is never very definite, because that desire in *Holiday* was expressed almost entirely in dialog, the one medium that could enhance its indefiniteness, it became that specific intangible thing called happiness the whole world is reaching for, dreaming of.

Dialog alone made the "desire to live" in *Holiday* everybody's very special desire to live. Nothing the camera could have pictured would have universalized it so effectively, endeared it to the hearts of so many people.

It was the camera that gave background and characters furthering the other main pursuit—reverence for riches—most of its appeal. A mansion with apart-

ments and private elevators for every member of the family. A tacitly yessing regiment of stuffed shirts showing a deference to the father that implied great weight in the high places of 'change; wealth, power and luxury, visibly defending business and social careers as something everybody should want.

And now, having feebly described in the printed word how dialog kept alive the desire to live, how the camera did the same for reverence for riches, let us see what camera and microphone did not attempt to do.

The desire to live was not expressed in a montage of boating, golf, riding, polo, skating, bridge, poker, baseball, football, tennis, gardening, hunting or fishing. And there was no lingering in any of those diversions with either dialog or camera. If there had been appeal would have narrowed to hunting or fishing, polo or baseball.

There was a brief reference to swimming, the hero had never had enough swimming, but that was all. Nor were there any special tastes mentioned. Old china, gate-legged tables, first editions. No vacationing locales mentioned. The hero merely wanted to live.

And now what of dialog in picturing the reality and the desirability of things they did not want, did not like, things that stood in the way of their desire to live?

Although the hero's fiancee was quite sure she could make her father see in the hero the qualities their grandfather had, there was a strong doubt whether he would be acceptable in a house where money was god. And the first thing their father asked about on being told about the young man was his background. "Is he the sort of person that—?" And from there on the father's personality, his social and financial background, through the voice of the camera, pictured unmistakably what he meant by "the sort of person—?"

His daughter, amused at the hero's idea of living said little, but sawed much wood for the millions she wanted him to make, going quietly ahead with plans for his career in Big Business, upon which her social future depended.

There were occasional direct references to the family's wealth, Fifth Avenue frontage, the Vested Interests, the desirability of piling up enough money to

be able to live comfortably on the income from income, but those references were so infrequent they counted for very little in enhancing and enlarging the business and social careers. But those careers needed no oral build-up. The camera did the job with an eloquence that was unmistakable.

In fact, dialog was wholly inadequate in picturing that reverence forcefully enough to make it a real contender for the hero's future, or Holiday a close contest.

Despite the appeal inherent in the desire to live, in time off from what they were doing day in and day out, in a honeymoon abroad, and the extent to which dialog made audience and players one in the furtherance of those pursuits, and despite the relative non-appeal in the business and social careers, the camera made appeal in those careers so effectual the hero finally capitulated, decided to try business for a while.

In all plays, screen and stage, there is an element of competition. In great movies that element is strong, active, compelling.

In *The Three Smart Girls* the three lovely daughters were competing with the siren and her mother for the affections of their daddy. In *The Late Christopher Bean* the maid and the old doctor were competing for possession of the valuable paintings. In *The Sin of Madelon Claudet* the mother and those opposing her were competing to secure and protect her boy's future.

In *The Champ*, the ex-champ, long out of training, bravely tried a comeback, not alone to win the love and respect of his young son, but he wanted to give the boy more of the good things of life than the boy's wealthy mother, the ex-champ's ex-wife, was offering. She was trying to lure him away from the environment in which his father lived, a Mexican gambling resort.

In a major sense the main pursuits in *The Champ* were identical, although opposing; both mother and father trying to assert a guardianship they thought best for their son's future.

Working toward the same end, appeal inherent in the Champ's and his ex-wife's pursuit was the same, indicating an evenly matched contest. And that's the way *The Champ* started off, odds even. But the moment furtherance began the odds shifted.

First, the Champ's background: Tourists and habitués in the gambling resort were by their presence there alone manifestly supporting the Champ's worst enemy, liquor and dice, enhancing the lure of the race-track, the bar and crap tables.

Thus two conflicts raged in the picture and the outcome of the Champ's struggle with the Demon Rum and the cackling ivories would decide the outcome of the competition for the boy's affections. However, the Champ's struggle with the "twin evils" was so bungling and pathetic, he was so out of training, so flabby, heavy-footed and slow, reaction was overwhelmingly sympathetic, suspense in that quarter lightening in direct ratio to his condition.

Because the Champ was obviously licked before he began his fight the mother's pursuit looked like an easy winner. And the gambling resort, the tourists and habitués, colorful and exciting, the atmosphere, gala and happy, and the boy's lively prospects of owning and racing a horse of his own further made the mother's promises of something better a weak contender.

If the mother had produced one or two of the things dear to a boy's heart, had given the holiday atmosphere of the gambling resort a little competition, there might have been a contest; but what she offered was in dialog, an inducement in the abstract, "just a lot of talk" as far as kids are concerned.

True there was some emphasis on evil surroundings, but the evil in a gambling resort, Lady Luck presiding, escape from humdrum, is wide open to question.

In reviewing the movies it is well to keep in mind that the presence of things enhance and accentuate appeal and non-appeal so clearly and unmistakably that any question regarding appeal or non-appeal is automatically out of order. On the other hand dialog can lessen the non-appeal of things absent.

In *The Three Smart Girls* the fortune hunting siren was young, alluring and **present**, while the girls' mother was aging, unalluring and **absent**.

Absence of the mother actually enhanced her appeal and therefore the appeal in the girls' quest, while her presence might have detracted.

In fact dialog was considered so ineffectual the

studio left out any mention of the mother once the girls arrived in New York. They represented her so well by their presence alone any oral plea would have been superfluous.

With the girls' love-sick boy friends wholly unreliable, the siren present and so alluring, their daddy determined to indulge his second youth, their campaign needed all the visible support it could get.

In conclusion, if the reader has a yen for smart, profound or poetic talk it would be well for him to remember that many movies of great promise have foundered on the deceptive shoals of dialog, of talking about things that should have been cameraed, steered onto the rocks of patter and repartee that even at its graphic best cannot picture ideas and desires, action, people and background as vividly as the camera.

On the other hand, the camera often tries to enhance and enlarge things that would be much more appealing if talked about. Seeing may be believing but the sight of things is not always appealing, or non-appealing.

## CHAPTER 10

### Romance

Whether the fact that the better movies invariably subordinated the pursuit of romance is evidence conclusive that its pursuit as screen fare is not as exciting as it is cracked up to be, we would not know, but no movie, regardless of how much its pursuit of romance has been unveiled, garboed and gabled, has ever achieved great movie rating.

In but two of the great movies we have reviewed in this book was the pursuit of romance a main sympathetic pursuit. One was *Theodora Goes Wild*. And summed up, what treatment did scripter and director accord *Theodora's* passion?

Early in the story we saw a maiden lady in her early thirties shedding inhibition via the authoring of a naughty novel. Then she met the artist who designed the jacket to her book and inhibition dissolved like mist in a midday sun.

Now sympathy is surefire for girls who have let romance slide until their charms begin to fade, yet with that far-reaching appeal inherent in *Theodora's* pursuit, the studio took no chances on it building an adequate sympathy.

First, they had the artist chase *Theodora* until she finally caught him. And not quite satisfied with that inversion, with that surefire bid for laughs, her pursuit was given a terrific two-social level opposition bigger than anything ever before attempted on the screen, one that kept *Theodora* so busy combatting it there was no chance of an audience let-down.

The pursuit of romance was one of the sympathetic pursuits in *The Three Smart Girls* but it too was treated for laughs, amply enhanced and opposed, appeal and non-appeal acutely balanced. Three boys wanted girls. Daddy wanted his siren. His business manager wanted his daughter Kay. The young Australian Lord wanted his other daughter, Joan. Then there was Penny, played by Deanna Durbin with the Durbin voice tossed in for good measure. And finally, the main sympathetic pursuit was not the pursuit of romance. It was getting Daddy back to Mammy.

Again in *She Done Him Wrong*, that movie's much

amplified pursuit of romance, six or more huskies on the make for Diamond Lil, was not the main sympathetic pursuit. Their common desire was in the dominant sense the menace. Of course, Lil wanted the mission worker but that longing was secondary to keeping the boys who were on the make at bay until she could land her man.

Although girl wants boy as a main pursuit has never carried the heights, it is a good thing with which to start any play off. Bad Girl, for instance, got up steam with boy wants girl but that pursuit quickly concluded in marriage, which as quickly gave way to girl and boy trying to get along in the marriage pen. In *The Redheaded Woman* girl wanted boy but getting him was merely the door to social recognition.

Many good movies with the pursuit of romance as the main attraction have tried for the higher annual awards, tried subtly, gustily, politely and valiantly but none have made the grade. And we are not overlooking Garbo in *Camille*; even though the Garbo has a special talent for draining the tear ducts when romance is being denied. But *Camille* was not a great movie.

Garbo's sacrifice in *The Lady of the Camellias* was a noble piece of work but nobility as a sympathy-getter died with George M. Cohan's *Flag-Waving Finales* and was buried with "I'd Rather Be Right."

Why has the pursuit of romance always been subordinated, excessively enlarged and enhanced, treated as a menace or treated for laughs in the really successful movies? We wouldn't dare to know, but there is this conjecture, not without foundation, that marital intimacies flattening the wine of romance, quenching love's earlier fires and mysteries, truly dilutes the thrill and glamour for those who are married and it happens that ever since holy and legal sanction has been invoked in the marital pact close to 85% of the population is married, or has been married or something. Along with that condition we have a strong hunch that the low assay on romance is due to its pursuit being selfish, never really charitable.

In *My Man Godfrey* there was but one thing openly and actively hindering Godfrey and that was selfishness in its purest form, or girls on the prowl for a man, the Flighty One, the maid and the Vengeful Sis-



ter; their real concern over Godfrey's welfare as obvious as a slow wink.

Even though expressed in three lovely women on the make, their pursuit could not be interpreted as anything else. And their numbers made selfishness a major menace.

All conjecture aside, we are quite sure of one thing and that is that Greta Garbo, Mae West, Alice Faye, Rosalind Russell and Gail Patrick, arm in arm, marching on the army and navy defended by Robert Taylor and Clark Gable in bath towels would not make a great movie. Exciting, yes, but never remembered as long as a *Holiday* or a *Street Scene*, *My Man Godfrey* or *The Three Smart Girls*. In fact, romance as a main sympathetic pursuit takes even more than Leslie Howard and Norma Shearer as *Romeo and Juliet* could give it, backed up by all of casting's Capulets and Montagues and their respective retinues.

Which is not another way of saying that the pursuit of romance is unimportant as entertainment. On the contrary, it is quite important because romance is a natural complement to every other pursuit in life, making complete, whole and compelling everything that engages our interest. But that is all romance is, a complement, as far as really great entertainment is concerned.

Whether or not it is so in life the pursuit of romance in all of the better movies is disillusioningly the villain, the heavy, the big obstacle to the furtherance of something much more important.

There are, of course, exceptions to the foregoing conclusions wherein for example, a woman carries a torch in the back streets of a respectably married man's life but the end of that pursuit is necessarily unhappy—if the man is respectably married—and those movies are incidentally as few and as appealing to intelligent people as the torch carriers they portray.

Though the relative non-appeal of romance as entertainment may be obvious the furtherance of its pursuit absorbs most of the creative energy in Hollywood today and in view of the tremendous amount of physical and mental energy that goes into the furtherance of romance, the dispassionate going over we have

just given it is bound to arouse a widespread challenge, particularly among the ladies, and because 65% of the movie audience is supposed to be made up of the gentler sex perhaps we haven't been entirely fair to that tenderest and loveliest of all emotions. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to see a movie that could arouse as much favorable comment as My Man Godfrey or The Three Smart Girls or Holiday with the pursuit of romance as the main sympathetic pursuit, not hitched to a "desire to live" not as a menace, not inverted for laughs but straight as it was in Street Scene.

## CHAPTER 11

### Life and The Camera

Is it possible for the camera to look at life, honestly, and still be entertaining?

The answer is, honesty and life imply many things, and the way that question reads it certainly implies that the screen has been dishonest, but not that it has not been entertaining. In fact we can forget that part of the question entirely. Hollywood is staffed and geared to make almost anything entertaining.

If looking at life, honestly, implies that the screen is not doing its bit for the Truth, an honest camera in that sector is next to impossible.

If the camera were to look fairly and squarely for 70 minutes at the way the Truth is kicked around in this nation of nations, five minutes after the newspapers reported the picture those to the left of us, those to the right of us and those behind us would rise together and "certainly take steps!" That is if censors would let a movie like that get as far as the screen.

Granted that the conflicts stewing on our many political and economic fronts would add tremendously to the appeal of any movie, that the changes taking place in the social structure today would add that timely something the screen needs, that the screen might be helpful in levelling many nationally mountainous molehills, but the screen is a local medium, a community proposition, as well as a national.

The Truth for which one class or group clamors so earnestly in print too often becomes an ugly partisan reality in the camera. And what happens when that reality appears on the screen in any given community? One or another articulate minority immediately yells **Propaganda!** And the theatre owner holds an empty bag, facing the grim fact that his theatre has become a soap-box, and the more disconcerting fact that the axes most people want to grind are extremely dull. Happily, the screen has been able to say NO to all forms of special pleading, which does not mean that the case for honesty and timeliness in nation-wide entertainment is entirely hopeless.

My Man Godfrey, The Three Smart Girls, Mr. Deeds Goes to Town, Theodora Goes Wild, Over the Hill, The Miracle Man, Street Scene and Holiday did some profitable spade-work in the no-camera-land of moot and timely issues. In Mr. Deeds Goes to Town it was the unemployment problem.

Although well aware that unemployment was calling upon the right hand to see less of the left hand than at any time in history, Capra and Riskin saw no reason to vindicate Deeds' generosity. They lit no torches for indiscriminate giving or loaning. Nor did they try to rationalize it. They merely reported a possible reaction, and the report rang true.

Smug fear of scandal was one of the main pursuits in Theodora Goes Wild. Of course that fear was not imagined as authentically as some would have liked, but the ineffectuality of society's pretenses was there for any one who cared to read; millions of pious frauds had a front seat at the mirror.

That there is no fool like an old fool was the thought the Three Smart Girls tried to impress upon their lovelorn pater. And they managed, finally, to get him back to their mother, but the prodigal father was not convinced that his place was with their mother, nor was the audience.

The father did not contribute enthusiastically to the belief that a husband owes a wife something beyond his duty as father and provider, irrespective of her virtues. That he did not was the thing that gave the picture most of its appeal.

When Godfrey was called up to the judge's stand to qualify as a Forgotten Man he took one telling crack at the idle rich and not until his curtain speech did Godfrey again comment directly or indirectly on society's delinquencies.

His fraternity brother remarked at the city dump that the men living in Shantytown had never known anything better and Godfrey corrected him, briefly, but that was all, and it was enough, as far as the controversial aspects were concerned.

The ineffectuality of parents was not soft-pedaled in Over the Hill, nor was there any leaning away from untoward implications regarding faith-healing in The Miracle Man.

At no time did producers, writers and directors in guiding the destinies of Godfrey, Deeds, Theodora, Johnny Case, the mothers and fathers in Over the Hill, Street Scene, Holiday and The Three Smart Girls pander to any of the venerable pretenses or hypocrisies, either in or out of the premises.

There was no striving to be neutral or unbiased; no particular emphasis on man's inhumanity to man, nor upon that more unpopular fact of man's inhumanity to himself. Yet man's ineffectuality, man's higher purposes and the problems of leadership were at times starkly cross-sectioned, were clearly etched for those honestly interested in honesty in entertainment. Nor clan nor creed were affronted. Those movies aroused nobody's ire nor drew anybody's fire.

There were no noble gestures, no idealizations, no noble sacrifices, no half-truths caricatured, no striving for the sensational, no obvious build-up for smashing climaxes, no patent intensifiers, no noticeable amount of bathos or pathos. Yet sympathy, suspense and believability built with the stride of a war threat.

We wonder now as we look back if it is unreasonable to believe that in disregarding so many things always thought taboo or essential to movie production those great movies haven't given us a long sought key to honesty in entertainment, haven't pointed a way to a higher purpose for the screen?

The End







